DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 428 296 CE 078 387

AUTHOR	Negra, Christine; Frey, Lois M.
TITLE	Identifying Factors Leading to Effective Local Conservation Commissions. An Investigation in New Hampshire and Vermont.
SPONS AGENCY	Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development, University Park, PA.
PUB DATE	1998-06-00
NOTE	113p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; *Agencies; *Agency Role; Air Pollution; Community Action; Community Cooperation; Community Involvement; *Community Organizations; Conservation Education; *Conservation (Environment); Educational Needs; Natural Resources; Physical Environment; State Programs; Statewide Planning; Sustainable Development; *Water Pollution; Water Resources
IDENTIFIERS	*Conservation Commissions; New Hampshire; Vermont

ABSTRACT

A study investigated the nature and function of 206 New Hampshire and 74 Vermont conservation commissions empowered to protect natural resources. Qualitative and quantitative research methods gathered data from a small number of commissioners and identified common patterns, then tested their prevalence through a survey of all commissions. Patterns observed in interviews were as follows: commissioners' roles were conservation of land and watchdog for environmental violations; some town boards did not support commissions; meetings were informal or lacked focus or structure; communication with the community was difficult; obstacles were public resistance, insufficient time and money to accomplish projects, and frustration with the pace of progress; some commissioners were concerned about maintaining membership levels; motivation for membership included love of the outdoors and hope to reverse or prevent environmental degradation; and persistence and acceptance of the slow pace of conservation work were important. The survey found commissions were very concerned with degradation of water resources; the most prevalent obstacle was recruitment of new members; and relatively few commissions reported unsuccessful experiences with the 29 strategies listed. Findings were synthesized and suggestions made for commissions to improve their effectiveness in identifying and achieving conservation goals and for extension and other entities to assist them. (Appendixes contain 18 references, instruments, and descriptions of potential partners for outreach.) (YLB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 428 296

Identifying Factors Leading to Effective Local Conservation Commissions

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

June 1998

Written by:
Christine Negra
University of Vermont Extension
Burlington, VT

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

DK Heasley

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Funded by:
The Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development
University Park, PA

CE078387

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PROGRAMS OF THE NORTHEAST REGIONAL
CENTER FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT ARE
AVAILABLE EQUALLY TO ALL PEOPLE

Identifying Factors Leading to Effective Local Conservation Commissions

An Investigation in New Hampshire and Vermont

June 1998

Principal Investigators:

Christine Negra
University of Vermont Extension
590 Main St.
Burlington, VT 05401
(802) 656-8373
"cnegra@zoo.uvm.edu"

Lois M. Frey
University of Vermont Extension
RR 4, Box 2298
Montpelier, VT 05602
(802) 223-2389
"lfrey@sover.net"

Funded by:
The Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development
University Park, PA

Cover photo:
Hamilton Falls, Jamaica State Park, Vermont

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their involvement and support during this project:

The many conservation commissioners in New Hampshire and Vermont who participated in our research interviews and mail survey
Virginia Rasch, Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions
Marjory Swope, New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions
University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension
University of Vermont Extension
Northern Nurseries, White River Junction, VT and Barrington, NH
Jeannie McIntyre, Upper Valley Land Trust
Susan Clark, Northern Sustainable Communities Network
Sharon Francis, Connecticut River Joint Commission
Sharon Whitaker, Center for Rural Studies, University of Vermont
Tom Duffy, New Hampshire Office of State Planning
New Hampshire State Library

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction 1

II. Background 3
  A Brief Description of Conservation Commissions 3
  Educational Opportunities for Conservation Commissioners 3
  The Need for Local Conservation Action 4

III. Study Methods 7
  Qualitative Research Methods 7
  Quantitative Research Methods 11

IV. Qualitative Analysis 15
  The Role of the Conservation Commission 15
  Working With Other Town Boards 18
  Commission Dynamics 21
  Community Outreach 25
  Obstacles/Barriers 28
  Making Use of Information Resources 31
  Membership Needs 33
  Motivation for Joining the Conservation Commission 35
  Financial Resources 38
  Training Needs 41
  Success and Failure of Conservation Commission Projects 44

V. Quantitative Data Analysis 49
  "What Environmental Problems Is Your Commission Concerned About?" 49
  "What Frustrations Has Your Commission Encountered?" 54
  "What Strategies Has Your Commission Used?" 59
  "Who Completed the Questionnaire?" 65

VI. Synthesis of Findings 67
  What Strategies Do Commissioners Perceive As Most Useful for Achieving Local Conservation Goals? 67
  What Types of Obstacles Are Encountered By Conservation Commissioners and How Do They Deal With Them? 67
  Do Conservation Commissioners Have the Organizational Capacity to Maintain and Expand the Scope of Their Conservation Work? 67
  What Relationships Do Conservation Commissions Have With Town Residents? 68
  How Do Conservation Commissioners Obtain and Make Use of Informational, Financial and Other Resources? 68

6

VII. Recommendations 71
Recommendations for Conservation Commissions 71
  Role of Conservation Commissions 71
  Working with Other Town Boards 72
  Working Well As a Group 72
  Developing Credibility with Town Residents 73
  Overcoming Barriers 74
  Getting Help From Outside Your Community 74
  Recruiting and Keeping New Commissioners 75
  Identifying and Meeting Your Financial Needs 76
  Seeking Training 76
  Getting Projects Started....And Finished 77
Recommendations for Extension and Other Helping Agencies 77
  Organizational Development/Community Outreach 77
  Natural Resources and Agriculture 78
  Public Policy 78
  Technical Capability 79
  Partnerships 79
  General Approaches 80
  Helping Agencies 80

VIII. Evaluation 83
  Evaluation of Research Methods 83
  Dissemination of Study Findings 84
  Evaluation of Project Outcomes 84

References 87

Appendices

A. Interview Questions
B. "About This Research Project...."
C. Cover Letter and Questionnaire
D. Reminder Postcard
E. Open-Ended Responses From New Hampshire/Vermont Conservation Commission Survey
F. Potential Partners for Outreach to Conservation Commissions

7

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Rate of response by conservation commissions to mail survey 13
Table 2. Responses by New Hampshire and Vermont conservation commissions to the question "What Environmental Problems is Your Commission Concerned About?" 50
Table 3. Responses by New Hampshire conservation commissions to the question "What Environmental Problems is Your Commission Concerned About?" 52
Table 4. Responses by Vermont conservation commissions to the question "What Environmental Problems is Your Commission Concerned About?" 53
Table 5. Responses by New Hampshire and Vermont conservation commissions to the question "What Frustrations Has Your Commission Encountered?" 55
Table 6. Responses by New Hampshire conservation commissions to the question "What Frustrations Has Your Commission Encountered?" . 57
Table 7. Responses by Vermont conservation commissions to the question "What Frustrations Has Your Commission Encountered?" 58
Table 8. Responses by New Hampshire and Vermont conservation commissions to the question "What Strategies Has Your Commission Used?" 60
Table 9. Responses by New Hampshire conservation commissions to the question "What Strategies Has Your Commission Used?" 62
Table 10 Responses by Vermont conservation commissions to the question "What Strategies Has Your Commission Used?" 63
Table 11. Distribution of response options for New Hampshire and Vermont conservation commissions. 65
Table 12. Distribution of response options for New Hampshire conservation commissions. 65
Table 13. Distribution of response options for Vermont conservation commissions. 66

8

I. INTRODUCTION

Complex forces act upon and within rural communities in northern New England and create changes in the natural and social landscape. Rural communities need an effective local mechanism for identifying and acting on their goals for conservation of terrestrial, aquatic, recreational, and biological resources and for shaping the future landscape of their communities.

In response to this need, we initiated a research project to investigate the nature and function of conservation commissions, a local entity with tremendous potential for catalyzing conservation in New Hampshire and Vermont communities. We wanted to know what factors help and hinder the effectiveness of conservation commissions. The objectives of our project were:

1. To document successful and unsuccessful strategies used by conservation commissions to identify and achieve local conservation goals.
2. To identify factors correlated with successful conservation commission action.
3. To develop guidelines for Extension efforts to provide needed information and assistance to conservation commissioners and to facilitate creation of new conservation commissions.
4. To reach out to other educational and service organizations and agencies to encourage their increased involvement with conservation commissions.
5. To share information gained through our research project with existing conservation commissions to help them enhance their effectiveness.

Our intention is that our research findings will enable Extension and other educational and service agencies to improve and expand their assistance to existing conservation commissions and to towns and cities considering establishing one. Study findings clarify the value and potential of conservation commissions for effective local conservation action. We hope that this clarification will increase incentives within local communities to create or reactivate conservation commissions.

Residents of local communities are often best situated to understand local natural resource issues and to propose politically feasible conservation options because they are intimately familiar with the limitations and opportunities of the local landscape and political climate. New environmental challenges such as reduction in nonpoint source pollution and environmental stewardship of privately owned lands require involvement by a greater proportion of local residents. Conservation action initiated by local people can build on trust and friendship relationships to achieve broad participation.

Our project was implemented through a partnership of organizations in New Hampshire and Vermont. Participating groups include: the University of Vermont Extension, University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension, the New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions, the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions, and three organizations that work with local groups in both states, the Upper Valley Land Trust, the Northern Sustainable Communities Network, and the Connecticut River Joint Commission. In April 1997, representatives of these

9

organizations met as a Project Advisory Board to plan our research agenda.

The Project Advisory Board decided to conduct a qualitative research effort, followed by a quantitative research component. This strategy enabled us to gather rich data from a small number of commissioners and to identify common patterns, and then to test the prevalence of these patterns through a shorter survey of all New Hampshire and Vermont commissions.

Findings from our research provide information about how conservation commissioners perceive the role of their commission, the types of challenges that commissioners encounter, and strategies they use to overcome these challenges. There is considerable diversity between and within the two states in terms of the financial resources that commissions have, the level of environmental training individual commissioners have received, and the level of support commissions have within their communities. There is considerable variation in the amount of community outreach that commissions take on.

Chapter II outlines the context that conservation commissions operate within. Chapter III describes the methods used to implement this study. Chapters IV and V, respectively, describe the findings from the qualitative and quantitative research components. Chapter VI synthesizes these two sets of information and identifies major patterns. Chapter VII outlines recommendations for conservation commissioners, Extension and other groups based on study findings. Chapter VIII evaluates the work described in this report.

II. BACKGROUND

This section outlines the context for our study of New Hampshire and Vermont conservation commissions.

A Brief Description of Conservation Commissions

There are currently 206 conservation commissions in New Hampshire (of 234 municipalities) and 74 conservation commissions in Vermont (of 246 municipalities). These local boards are empowered to protect natural resources within their communities, but do not have regulatory powers. Commission projects include: restoration, conservation, education, policy development, land management, proposed development review, and natural resource inventory and monitoring.

Commission funding resources vary. In New Hampshire, most conservation commissions have an operating budget provided by the municipality. More than 25% receive funds through a use change tax imposed upon land that becomes ineligible for current use assessment. In Vermont, some commissions receive municipal allocations. Others are solely reliant on fundraising efforts.

In both states, restoration projects have included improvement of wildlife habitat and riparian zones, streambank stabilization, and tree planting. Land conservation efforts have addressed preservation of prime agricultural land, open land, and wetlands, as well as creation and management of town forests and recreation trails. Conservation commissioners review proposed developments, conduct resource inventories and land use mapping, and draft ordinances. They initiate recycling, composting, energy conservation, and clean-up events. They work in partnership with state and national agencies and organizations, landowners, and other local commissions. They educate and communicate with other community members through public forums, farm tours, nature walks, and opinion surveys.

Conservation commissions in New England, New York and New Jersey differ in structure and function and their level of activity varies. For example, in Massachusetts, commissions have regulatory authority -- no wetland development may occur without a permit from local conservation commissions. By comparison, Connecticut commissions only have regulatory authority if they opt to function as a combined conservation-inland wetland commission. There is no national association for conservation commissions.

Educational Opportunities for Conservation Commissioners

In New Hampshire, the Extension Service has provided a variety of educational opportunities for conservation commissioners and has recently assisted with a pilot community environmental outreach program in which university students implemented projects proposed by eighteen towns.

The New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions offers a legislative bulletin and a commissioner's handbook. Workshops and an annual meeting enable commissioners to exchange ideas. County Foresters provide occasional training sessions for conservation commissioners in forestry issues and natural resource inventories. New Hampshire commissioners can participate in workshops offered by the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, the Audubon

Society, and other statewide and regional entities.

In Vermont, Extension education directed toward conservation commissions are primarily add-ons to existing local government programs. Few programs are designed specifically around local conservation options. Conservation commissioners are a small proportion of participants at annual conferences and regional workshops for town officers.

The Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions provides a quarterly newsletter, *The Seedling*, that shares information on funding and information resources, lists current projects of active commissions, and provides articles on current issues. The first annual meeting was held in 1996.

The Need for Local Conservation Action

Numerous publications document the need for greater local involvement in natural resource conservation and identify directions for a renewed emphasis on local communities.

Natural Resources Protection

The Vermont Agency of Natural Resources' annual state of the environment report, "Environment 1996," points to several critical environmental challenges faced by Vermonters: management of nonpoint sources of water pollution; source reduction of solid wastes, hazardous materials, and toxic emissions; and conservation-minded stewardship of privately owned land. The agency works within the frameworks of ecosystem management, sustainable development, and preservation of biological diversity, with emphasis on local action:

> "Water pollution control traditionally has been a top-down process in which federal and state governments have exerted their authority to regulate specific point-source discharges ... The more difficult task of protecting and further enhancing aquatic ecosystems is dependent on bottom-up, or grassroots, activism."

The report points to the growth of locally based, volunteer monitoring programs that "have brought together multiple interests -- economic, recreational, spiritual, and environmental -- into partnerships to help manage the watershed ecosystem in a manner that is equitable to all."

The New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services' 1994 Water Quality Report calls for greater focus on nonpoint sources of water pollution and abatement at the watershed rather than the state level. Key areas identified for action include preventing lake eutrophication and restoring the health of coastal estuaries. New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services plans to expand its involvement with volunteer citizen monitoring programs on rivers and streams.

The 1996 New Hampshire Forest Resources Plan points to changes in land use resulting from population growth and development pressure. The Plan identifies a gap in forest land and easement acquisition as there is currently no coordinated statewide process. Local decision-making and public education are cited as critical in protecting the state's forest resources. Many of the Plan's recommendations for maintaining a sustainable, forest-based economy emphasize local involvement and fall within the jurisdiction of conservation commissions: (1) communicating about the balance between property rights and social and ecological values; (2) building coalitions between landowners and recreationists; (3) involving citizens in planning for a statewide ecological reserves system; (4) providing communities with tools for long-range land use decision-making; (5) encouraging landowners to conduct biological inventories; (6) expanding community forestry; and (7) aligning goals of local land use plans and state forest resources plans.

Sustainable Development

In the 1980s, Northern New England experienced higher population growth rates--20.4% in New Hampshire and 10.2% in Vermont-- than the rest of New England with an average of 6.9% for all six states (Center for Rural Studies, 1993). However, population density in these states is low. Rural communities in New Hampshire and Vermont are faced with increasing pressures for urbanization and suburbanization. These pressures necessitate goal-setting and action at both the state and local level to preserve elements of rural life that citizens value and to negotiate transitions to economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

"Sustaining Agriculture: A Handbook for Local Action" outlines local strategies for promoting sustainable agriculture (Brighton & Northrup, 1994). Many strategies, including purchase of development rights, educating nonfarmers about economic, environmental, and social benefits of local agriculture, coalition-building, and integrating farmers and their advocates into local planning, fall within the purview of local conservation commissions.

The Vermont Economic Progress Council's "A Plan for a Decade of Progress, 1995" emphasizes that strategic planning at the local level is an essential component of statewide sustainable economic development, specifically in promoting a strong "growth center" orientation in land use policy. Conservation commissions can help to promote growth center development at the local level through municipal plan development and public education.

Rural residents have a variety of perspectives on how their community should develop. The 1994 Vermonter Poll found that 60% of Vermonters felt that growth and development should be encouraged, but this group was split on the type of development they find appropriate (Wiberg, Guptill & Schmidt, 1995). One-third felt that growth and development should be limited. Conservation commissions can facilitate local discussion to identify common ground and build agreement about types of development that should be encouraged and discouraged.

In "Environment 1996," the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources makes the point that, "Economic development cannot be sustained if it continually undermines the healthy functioning of Vermont's ecosystems or exhausts its natural resources. Balancing economic growth and environmental protection should not be framed as an either-or proposition."

Citizen Involvement

A 1995 survey of Vermont town officers revealed a common perception that there is a strong need for greater participation and communication within towns (Negra, Hathaway, & Wiberg, 1995). Officers commented that, "Too few people have to do too much of the work and then get blamed by the uninvolved for trying to take over the town" and "Public apathy -- lack of citizen responsibility -- I'm constantly amazed how little many know about local government."

Susan Clark's "Citizen Participation and Personal Political Power: Case Studies of Two Grassroots Environmental Groups" identified factors that contribute to local environmental involvement, continuous participation, and withdrawal from involvement (Clark, 1996). Clark found that conservation commissions let people express their connection to their community, are highly participatory, and strengthen environmental citizenship skills.

There are numerous aspects of natural resource protection, citizen awareness and involvement, and sustainable development in which conservation commissions can play an important role. As an arm of local government, a conservation commission can be a conduit for information, grant funds, and technical assistance into the community from outside organizations, as well as a conduit of information about conditions and needs within the community to outside organizations. To the extent that conservation commissions have the information, skills, and resources to effectively pursue local conservation work, we may see real improvement in local environmental quality.

III. STUDY METHODS

This section describes the methods used to accomplish our research objectives. We incorporated both qualitative and quantitative research strategies into our research programs in order to gather rich data from a small number of commissioners and to identify common patterns, then to test the prevalence of these patterns through a short survey of all New Hampshire and Vermont commissions.

Qualitative Research Methods

To guide the content and format of the qualitative research component of this study, we adopted the following research principles from Glesne and Peshkin (1992):

- Variables under study are complex, interconnected, and difficult to measure;
- Analysis strives to contextualize and interpret subjects' perspectives;
- Research ends, rather than begins, with hypotheses;
- Uses an inductive process whereby the researcher discovers concepts and hypotheses through constant comparative analysis;
- Searches for patterns;
- Data analysis is descriptive, not quantitative;
- Researcher's role is personal involvement and partiality and empathic understanding;
- Researcher and researched define the research problem (awareness of interviewees' needs);
- Questions are posed neutrally and nonthreateningly; active listening and response clarification techniques are used.

Development of Interview Content and Format

The Problem Statement that underlies this research project is:

> "To uncover what has helped some commissions and commissioners set and achieve their local conservation goals and what has hindered some commissions and commissioners from doing this."

Around this Problem Statement, we developed five General Research Questions:

1. What strategies do commissioners perceive as most useful for achieving local conservation goals?
2. What types of obstacles are encountered by conservation commissioners and how do they deal with them?
3. Do conservation commissioners have the organizational capacity to maintain and expand the scope of their conservation work? (Do conservation commissions have group process/dynamics that assist or inhibit identification and achievement of local conservation goals? Level of commitment? Types of skills commissioners bring?)
4. What relationships do conservation commissions have with town residents?

(What forms do community support take? How have commissions successfully built community support? How has controversy and local politics played a role in perceived success/failure of conservation efforts?)

5. How do conservation commissioners obtain and make use of informational, financial and other resources? (How can better access to resources be implemented? What "helping" agencies are commissioners familiar with and what is their perception of these agencies?)

From a master list of twenty-seven possible interview questions, we selected thirteen by identifying those most relevant to answering the five General Research Questions. A final interview question list is provided in Appendix A. All interviews were conducted by the Research Coordinator. Duration of interviews ranged from 35 minutes to 1 1/2 hours.

Interviews were conducted based on pre-set questions and follow-up probe questions "with freedom to build a conversation within a particular area, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style" (Patton, 1990). Questions sought to elicit information about individual commissioner's experiences and behaviors, as well as their opinions and values related to their membership on the commission. Initial questions were designed to gather basic factual information and set the interviewee at ease. A final question offered an opportunity for the interviewee to comment on anything not previously discussed.

Nearly all pre-set questions used an open-ended format and avoided a dichotomous response format in an effort to reduce "yes/no" responses and to encourage interviewees to respond descriptively[1]. Our intention was to seek stories and descriptions with emphasis placed not on "what" commissions have done rather on "why" projects were successful or unsuccessful. We attempted to minimize assumptions about commissioners' fluency with ecology or environmental policy. Questions were designed to eliminate value judgments or assumptions about "what commissions are supposed to do."

Site Selection

The research objectives center around understanding the conservation commission as the unit of analysis, rather than simply individual commissioners. For this reason, we determined that a minimum of five commissions in each state would be selected for research and that, to the greatest extent possible, all members of these commissions would be interviewed.

To select the commissions to be studied, we created a grid that tabulated the following for each commission and its town: activity level, geographic region, total population in 1990, percent population change (1980-1990), median household income, and the percent of the population below poverty[2]. Due to their familiarity with the activities of the commissions in their state, the executive directors of the New Hampshire and Vermont statewide conservation commission associations were able to categorize all of the commissions according to their level of activity. Virginia Rasch, Executive Director of the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions, placed commissions in the following categories: "Inactive," "Struggling," "Active," "Very Active," "Controversial," "Exceptional." Marjory Swope, Executive Director of the New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions, used the categories: "Inactive," "Active," "Highly Active" and "Controversial."

---

[1] Review of interview transcripts reveals that actual phrasing of questions deviated from pre-set list of questions and that dichotomous questions were used fairly frequently. Rarely did this appear to result in shortened or curt responses from interviewees.

[2] Information gathered from U.S. census and other state-level studies.

A comprehensive collection of 1996 conservation commission reports in annual town reports was gathered. AVCC and NHCC newsletters from recent years provided information about conservation commission activities and successes. Review of these documents supplemented activity level categories provided by Swope and Rasch.

We selected study sites by first organizing commissions by geographic region, then iteratively selecting commissions. As each commission was selected, we took care to eliminate commissions with similar demographic profiles from subsequent selections. Attention was also given to commission's proximity to major sites (e.g., urban areas, coastlines, national forests). Our primary objective in selecting study sites was to choose commissions that differed from one another. The result, in New Hampshire, was the selection of five commissions from different regions of the state that exhibit the following distribution:

- Town populations ranged from under 1,000 to over 7,000 (average 1990 population for towns with commissions was: 5,243)
- Percent population change 1980-1990 ranged from 4% to 68% (average percent population change 1980 to 1990 for towns with commissions was 28%)
- Median household income ranged from under $25,000 to nearly $39,000 (average 1990 median household income for towns with commissions was $36,553)
- Percent of population below poverty ranged from 3.5% to 10.2% (average percent of population below poverty in 1990 for towns with commissions was 6%)

The result, in Vermont, was the selection of five commissions from different regions of the state that exhibit the following distribution:

- Town populations ranged from under 300 to over 9,000 (average 1990 population for towns with commissions was 3,380)
- Percent population change 1980-1990 ranged from under 13% to over 40% (average percent population change 1980 to 1990 for towns with commissions was 16.5%)
- Median household income ranged from under $27,000 to over $40,000 (average 1990 median household income for towns with commissions was $33,152)
- Percent of population below poverty ranged from 3.5% to 9.6% (average percent of population below poverty in 1990 for towns with commissions was 8.2%)

Project Advisory Board members and staff at the New Hampshire Office of State Planning reviewed the list of selected commissions for "representativeness."

Contacting Commissioners

Once the commissions to be studied were identified, we contacted town offices to obtain contact information for the commission. In several cases, the town clerk was able to provide a list of the commissioners and their phone numbers. In other cases, the town clerk provided the name and phone number of the commission chair. We contacted each commissioner by telephone, usually beginning with the commission chair.

During the initial phone call, the Research Coordinator introduced herself and the purpose of the research project, provided basic information about the content and format of the interview (including that the interview would be recorded), explained that she wished to interview all members of the commission, and identified how the information would be used. She proposed a day and time to meet and adjusted to the commissioner's schedule until an interview time was agreed upon. She requested that the meeting time occur when they would not have other responsibilities to attend to such as children or phone calls and asked each commissioner to choose whether they preferred to meet at their home, place of business, town office, or other public location. In the event that they chose the town office, she offered to arrange with the town clerk for use of a private space.

In one instance, a meeting with one commissioner was impossible after repeated attempts. The individual offered to provide information via e-mail. Interview questions were sent electronically and relatively short responses were received. This information was included in the research findings.

Following initial phone contact, the Research Coordinator sent a confirmation letter and a cover story, titled "About This Research Project...," to interviewees (see Appendix B). The cover story provided information about the project including funding source, project partners, research objectives, philosophy and design, interview format, future uses of research data, commission selection process, and assurance of confidentiality.

Interviews

In total, our project has seen the successful completion of fifty-eight individual face-to-face interviews with the members of five conservation commissions in each of the two states, Vermont and New Hampshire. Each interview included a basic question framework, but allowed for exploration of unique topics. Extensive field notes were kept.

In general, interviews took place in a private, quiet setting. In five or six cases, interruptions occurred due to work or family responsibilities. Four of the fifty-eight face-to-face interviews occurred in a nonprivate setting. In one case, an interviewee offered to arrange the meeting at the town office, but upon arrival no private space was available and the interview had to be conducted in the presence of the town clerk and with considerable noise interruption from visitors to the town office.

All commissioner interviews were recorded with a small microcassette recorder. In a few cases, some material was lost due to background noise, operator error, or battery failure. The interviews lasted approximately one hour although some were as short as thirty-five minutes and others lasted up to one and one half hours. Interviews were conducted during day or evening hours, depending on the schedule of each interviewee. To minimize travel costs, the Research Coordinator attempted to schedule as many interviews as possible on the same trip to the area, often necessitating multi-day trips.

A majority of interviewees (forty-one) were cordial and/or eager to be interviewed. Six were somewhat reserved throughout the interview. Six were initially reserved, but warmed up to the interview. Four were, to some degree, tense and/or unforthcoming.

In some cases, commissioners provided written materials related to their commission's activities (i.e., minutes, by-laws, newsletters, brochures, etc.) In two cases, the Research Coordinator was able to observe commission meetings. Information gathered through these avenues was integrated into research findings.

Data Analysis

Our initial transcript review was structured around a data summary template in which particular "Needs/Problems/Ideas/Situations" were listed and corresponding "Strategies/ Responses" were described. Each "Strategy/Response" was given a rudimentary categorization of "worked" or "didn't work." A column was included for additional comments. This data summary template was designed to capture information relating to the types of strategies used by commissions, the degree of success experienced with these strategies, and situations that precipitated the use of these strategies. Vermont transcripts were reviewed by the Research Coordinator and Virginia Rasch while New Hampshire transcripts were reviewed by the Research Coordinator only.

Our second approach to the interview transcripts involved extracting most or all key quotes from each of the transcripts and inserting them into a document created for each commission. In these documents, quotes were grouped by subject areas identified through the initial transcript review:

- Role of Conservation Commission
- Working With Other Local Boards and Officials
- Commission Dynamics
- Community Outreach
- Obstacles/Barriers
- Making Use of Information Resources
- Commission Membership Needs
- Motivation for Joining the Commission
- Financial Resources
- Training Needs
- Success/Failure of Projects

Quotes that best illustrate patterns observed among commissioner transcripts are provided in Chapter IV.

Quantitative Research Methods

Based on information gained through the research interviews, we designed a short, easy-to-answer questionnaire intended to determine which of the patterns observed in the research interviews are most prevalent among New Hampshire and Vermont conservation commissions (see Appendix C -- Cover Letter and

Questionnaire). A mailing list of 255 conservation commissions was developed that excluded inactive commissions as well as commissions that participated in the qualitative component of the study.

Questionnaire Design

Question development centered around three primary questions with 79 question items distributed among these primary questions. The question "What Environmental Problems Is Your Commission Concerned About?" was designed to elicit information about the types of conservation issues that commissions are aware of and concerned about and possibly interested in working on in their community. Twenty-six question items were listed underneath this question and a 3-point response scale was provided.

The question "What Frustrations Has Your Commission Encountered?" was designed to elicit information about the types of logistical, organizational, communication, management, and other barriers that commissions have encountered and need assistance to overcome. Twenty-one question items were listed below this question and a 3-point response scale was provided.

The question "What Strategies Has Your Commission Used?" was designed to elicit information about the types of strategies commissions have used and with what degree of success, as well as the types of strategies commissions are and are not interested in learning more about. Twenty-nine question items were listed below this question and four response options were provided. For each of these three primary questions, an "Other" option was provided.

Survey Implementation and Response Rate

In early January, questionnaires were mailed to conservation commission chairs with a cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey and requesting that they bring the questionnaire to a commission meeting for completion or, alternatively, complete it themselves with input from individual commission members. Questionnaires were pre-addressed with return postage pre-paid. A prize drawing was offered as an incentive for participation. Northern Nurseries of White River Junction, VT has donated a 2-inch caliper sugar maple for planting in the winner community. Reminder postcards were mailed 2-3 weeks after the initial mailing to those commissions that had not yet returned questionnaires (see Appendix D).

By early February, 60 of 202 questionnaires were returned by New Hampshire commissions (30%), and 29 of 53 questionnaires were returned by Vermont commissions (55%). A second mailing was sent to the remaining New Hampshire commissions that had not yet responded. By mid-April, questionnaires ceased arriving and the survey was considered closed. At that time, 120 of 202 questionnaires were received from New Hampshire (59%), and 38 of 53 questionnaires were received from Vermont commissions (72%), for an overall response rate of 62%.

Four of the New Hampshire questionnaires were deemed unusuable for one of the following reasons: (1) multiple responses were received from the same community; (2) none of the question items were answered; (3) a town selectman responded indicating that the commission was no longer active. Consequently, data analysis was performed on 154 cases (116 New Hampshire; 38 Vermont).

20

Table 1. Rate of response by conservation commissions to mail survey.

	Received questionnaire	Returned questionnaire	Percent returned
New Hampshire	202	120	59%
Vermont	53	38	72%
New Hampshire and Vermont	255	158	62%

Response rates for individual question items were generally high. Of the 116 New Hampshire commissions, only one question item received less than 102 responses. Of the 38 Vermont commissions, no question items received less than 32 responses.

IV. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

This section outlines major patterns observed through interviews with New Hampshire and Vermont conservation commissioners. Quotes that best illustrate these patterns are provided, organized by major subject areas.

The Role of the Conservation Commission

New Hampshire

Some commissioners lack clarity about the role of their conservation commission and express interest in achieving greater focus.

> "We are reworking, again I think, our bylaws and we're re-working what our focus is. Those particular issues, we've been working off and on them for a while now. We've had other projects that have taken our energy away from that. We need to come back and regroup into the core and make it back out again."

> "Some of what we're going to work on is determined by things that come across the transom that need attention. And about a year or so ago ... we said we wanted to come up with a list of priorities and committees to try to define things a little more clearly so that we had a better sense of direction because there are so many things that we could be working on, so many things that seem important."

> "It's really finding the time to be more strategic in terms of what you can do."

Commissioners reveal different perceptions as to whether their commission is reactive or proactive.

> "When I started to learn what a commission does and what part it plays in the state, shaping the town - the more I've learned about that, the more enthusiastic I've become about it. Sort of pro-active role a commission can play."

> "I would say that, for the most part, we're reactive."

> "I think were a fairly good watchdog – I don't think we're particularly proactive, but I think that's understandable given the time and budget constraints and the lack of controversy. In general, I would say I'm glad we exist -- I think that there's certainly a reason for us to be there."

Conservation of land appeared as a major priority for some of the commissioners.

> " ... there's no question the essential issue is land protection."

> "One of the concepts and one of the most important things I think the Conservation Commission is doing ... is really developing the argument about open space vs traditional residential and commercial development."

> "Trying to save as much land from development as we can and within reason."

> "One of our projects with the Conservation Commission ... is to catalog the land that exists here in town, both that are protected at one end of the gamut and at the other end those that are prime pieces of property but are ripe for exploitation because they're farm lands and the people who own them may not be able to afford to keep them."

Many commissioners articulated a vision of themselves as a watchdog for environmental violations in their community.

> "I consider that we're a watchdog committee and if we see something happening that shouldn't happen, we're going to publicize and fight it to the best of our ability and people are aware that there is such a commission. I'm sure they don't lose any sleep over us, but those who want to develop and so forth know that somebody will be watching them."

> "We don't have a plan, that I know of. I think everyone's basic thought on that is that I'm here to make sure that what I think needs to be protected will be protected ... I would like to see us do some more work to make the citizens in town know where their resources are - where the conservation lands are."

> "Our role is, basically, to provide oversight on all activities that are occurring in the town."

There were differences of opinion about how controversial it is appropriate and effective for commissions to be.

> "You know you're having an impact in the town when the controversies occur - that's the way I look at it ... I guess controversy is good, because if you didn't have controversy then you'd have everybody thinking off the same sheet of music and we would be just rolling along, and who knows that the town would look like if it hadn't been for differences of opinion."

> "I'd say an irritant. I don't know that our presence is appreciated."

> "As long as we don't get too controversial. And the times that we get controversial is when we step on the toes of somebody who is trying to make money doing something."

> "The tendency is to avoid controversy ... it's much easier to avoid controversy, if you can. [Our chair] is not afraid to step in if he feels that he needs to. It's to his credit to do that."

A number of commissioners describe the need to seek compromise in pursuing their conservation objectives.

> "I really aspire to the fact that you have to fair and impartial and look out for the good of the town. Sometimes that doesn't set well with special interest groups. But, the bottom line is it - you have to do that. You may not believe in it, but you have to do that. Whatever's best for the overall good of the town."

> " ... there seems to be more of a compromise type situation for certain types of things. I mean, they look a little bit at the overall picture, and try not to be overly pretentious in their right to be involved in any of it. And I think in that same way they try to stay really true to any of the precedents that they might set along the way too."

> "I think it's function is to ... promote orderly growth, but the accent is on 'orderly' and not 'growth'. Not that it promotes growth, but it recognizes that growth will occur and tries to promote it in an orderly fashion that balances the needs of the town business and residential

communities with recreational and wildlife aspects of the town."

Although not articulated by a large number of interviewees, educational objectives were important to some of the commissioners.

> "We had prioritized our interests and clearly we wanted to be an educational resource for the people ... to do any of the things that we started identifying, such as outreaching to the public and, hopefully, being a possible educational tool for the Town Council and the other groups in town, before we could do any of those things we felt clearly we needed to know what exactly we were dealing with in terms of a natural resources within town."

> "Just to make sure that we are protecting the ecological interests of the town in addition to the economic and political ones. Having a few events where we could get the public to understand that and get involved in it with the commission."

Some commissioners pointed out the narrow scope of their activities and the limited authority they perceived their commission to possess.

> "The commission doesn't handle as many issues as I thought they would. Apparently, that's the way it's suppose to be -- it really is kind of a narrow range of issues that we deal with -- like we don't deal with recycling, the town well or sewer, or anything really associated with this -- obviously, there is someone else to do those. Somehow, I thought they would have more fingers out than they did."

> " ... sometimes people will say, 'gee, how come you are allowing that to happen?' ... Like they say to us why are we allowing it to happen? In some cases it's not strictly in our jurisdiction, but then, again, it's not strictly in anyone else's' jurisdiction, except maybe the selectmen, with a blanket of responsibility ... We don't have any authority. We don't have any power."

> "Our clout really comes, I think, from who we are much more than anything else. And how we present ourselves and how communicate in the town here. There's so much personally that all of us wanted to do, but as a commission, you have to kind of go easy and establish trust."

Development review emerged as one of the major areas of emphasis for many commissioners.

> "We took our role as advisors to the Wetlands Bureau pretty seriously, so if there was a dredge and fill permit application that came in, we always tried to make sure we followed through on that."

> "One of the responsibilities that we have, even though we don't have a jurisdictional responsibility on anything, is to review ... if someone files an application for a construction project within a sensitive habitat ... if there is an issue that's important, the state then sends ... the application down to the local Conservation Commission for review. And we give them input and then the state takes that and either issues the permit or modifies it or makes recommendations on how to modify their plans or whatever."

Vermont

Taking on a watchdog role in the community clearly emerged as a perceived responsibility for many commissioners.

> " ... we're in charge of education, but we're a little watchdog, too. Both of those things we should be doing."

Several commissioners indicated that providing information in an advisory capacity to other local boards was a key part of their commission's function.

> " ... it seems to me that the thing we could do is to continue to try to inform planning and zoning people ... to bring information to their table would be what we could do, but ultimately they are the ones who make a vision and who implement things to follow that."

> "I'm not really sure, but in my opinion, to me, the conservation commission and planning commission are intertwined, and they are supposed to be, legally, the conservation commission is supposed to advise or provide information to the planning commission."

Some commissioners feel that the exact role of the commission is unclear to them and to others and that additional focus is needed in order to become effective.

> "Well, we're not clear on our roles. What is the commission supposed to be doing? We seem to be fragmented ... I don't think we have a real clear understanding of the direction we're going in. We seem to be, as most groups, putting out fires, spending more time putting out fires, not having a bigger picture in mind."

> "I think there is still a misunderstanding around the state on what conservation commissions are all about and what they should be about. And I say that because I sat here at a selectmen's meeting not a month ago, and one of the selectmen made a comment that, 'You, know, that conservation club ... '"

> "There's a lot of things we'd like to do. It's hard to focus sometimes. Once they focus, the obstacles are just organizing yourself enough so we do it right. That's the important feeling. If you're going to do something, you should do it right or not at all."

Some commissioners expressed the wish that there would be more leadership at the state level to help conservation commissions define their role.

> "I think that the goals should be established by the individual commission, but that the State could take a leadership role rather than a regulatory role. A leadership and information role. And that would be very helpful ... we basically sort of operate there all by ourselves and are this self-contained unit, and if there were more support."

Some commissioners point to a vision for their community that defines the motivation and role of the commission. For example:

> "I think that, in my own personal view, the most significant issues is general lack of appreciation of what it means to be rural. In specific terms, not romantic terms."

Working with Other Town Boards

New Hampshire

Several commissioners reported experiences in which another town board failed to support the conservation commission.

> "I don't think all of us figured there was going to be the conflict and when we went forward with it in the first place, we thought we had the backing of the other town boards. And it was once the hearing came about that the backing kind of was not there."

> "I think we didn't get the support that we wanted from the Planning Board on making certain conditions of approval part of the project and we -- or I -- found that to be very frustrating -- to get up a planning board meeting and say, 'look, here are your regulations -- here's the Planning Board regulations, and they're not following this and that' ... it was certainly within the board's power to require it, and it would have made the project better all around and it still would have gotten done, and they just refused to stand up. I had a little trouble dealing with that."

Many commissioners expressed the opinion that local boards should work together more.

> "I think the ZBA, planning board and conservation commission should probably work closer together. Its not an easy thing to do ... "

> "One of the things we're trying to do is have better communication between the Selectmen, the Planning Board, the Board of Adjustment and us. I've had some good talks with the first Selectmen about this very topic. The head of the Planning Board had a meeting of all of us about a year ago -- it was a beginning. One of the things both of us and the commission have done -- it's a small thing, but - we had everybody circulate their minutes. It's a little thing, but now everybody knows what everybody's doing."

> "We have to work with the Planning Board, with ZBA, because they're the ones who are actually in charge of enforcing these so, consequently, we just give them suggestions and say, 'if you did this or if you did that, this would be better', etc."

Other town officials who are anti-conservation generated frustration for several interviewees.

> "I'll tell you what's frustrating about that is that a Selectman is a part of that ... when you find the Selectman, who is a member of that committee, is usually on the opposite side of the conservation issue, that's frustrating."

> "And the Planning Board, I'm convinced, was leaning towards the developer, rather than looking for ... they wanted to satisfy the commercial interest more than to preserve the integrity of the town."

One of the obstacles commissioners see to improved cooperation with other town boards is that they are not perceived as useful by other town officers.

> "I think the selectman tolerate us, and I don't think that the planning board or zoning board pay that much attention to us. I would say we're tolerated and we're humored. I don't think they consider us somebody that's very useful to them or somebody that they particularly want. We've have a terrible time getting any money approved for our budget, and that sort of thing."

> "But, some people on the board were ... less reticent to have us get involved than others. There were some people that just really didn't care what we had to say and others who were interested in what we had to say."

> "I think that our perceived informality, maybe contributed to the Planning Board's perception that our role was not very important."

Individuals on two of the five commissions interviewed reported very positive relations with other town boards.

> "So far, from what I've seen in town, there isn't a lot of divisiveness ... As far as the Planning Board and Zoning Board, there's always been the utmost cooperation."

> "With the Planning Board and the Selectmen we get along pretty well ... There doesn't seem to be any controversy about it -- they all have largely the same interests, recognition that development will happen, not wanting it to get out of hand, wanting to make it orderly."

> "All the boards are very supportive of environmental issues and they grant permits that we need, zoning permits or Planning Board permits. So, everybody's really up to speed on all the issues in town. I can't think of an issue that we haven't been able to resolve in a long time. Everybody's so cooperative."

Commissioners described the types of interactions they have had with other town officials and steps they have taken to improve relations.

> "One of the things that we've been trying to do more and more is not only go to Planning Board and Council meetings but we ... have got a Conservation Commission member appointed to the Planning Board as an alternate. So, the Conservation Commission is actively participating in the dialogue and having a voice."

> "There's been a few things come up lately, we've had a chance to work with the Selectmen on a violation in town. This is a first, which is great. We're actually communicating with the Selectmen, and they've asked us to communicate with Waste Management, and this is a first. And the point has been made to the first Selectmen by the commission that we really are there to support you and help you and if there are issues that are related to the commission."

> "There was one issue where the Planning Board was drafting an ordinance to locally control the spread of wildflowers, and the commission co-drafted that. At the public hearing the commission can pretty much sit back while the Planning Board gets skewered."

> " ... the citizen approaches us and says, 'I see a violation', then sort of unofficially ... one of or members might approach one of the selectmen and say we were approached ... There's some sort of contact there, usually."

It appears that one of the limitations to increased interaction and cooperation is time.

> "If you send somebody to a Conservation Commission once a month and then you send them to a Planning Board meeting maybe once or twice a month, depending if they have workshops, and if they're on one more major issue or if they have a really busy job, it gets thin. Somewhere it's got to give."

27

Vermont

Several commissioners pointed out that there is a lack of support for the conservation commission by other town boards and that there is commonly misperception about the commission's role.

> "We really don't have the support from the selectmen, and the planning commission has pretty much closed the door on us."

> "One of the obstacles, obviously, I think is the perceived attitude of the select board toward the conservation commission."

> "The select board might consider that too important an issue for a bunch of radicals like the conservation commission to be involved in."

Some commissioners point to the lack of contact between the conservation commission and other town boards.

> "I honestly think that, unless I have initiated phone calls to the planning commission, that I've never received a call from the planning commission."

Other commissioners simply articulate frustration in their interactions with other town boards.

> "I've been annoyed both with the selectmen and the planning commission."

> "But I guess both the Selectmen and the Zoning Commission haven't been totally straight with us at different times ... in some instances when they don't know what they are doing, they give us really confusing answers whereas it would probably be better to say 'Well, we're not clear on that yet ourselves' or something like that."

Commission Dynamics

New Hampshire

In several instances, commissioners pointed out that more of the work of the commission was taken up by a few members.

> "Generally the energy comes from 2-3 people on the commission ... "

> "The chair [has] been trying to give up some of his responsibilities. He doesn't want to be the conservation commission as far as everybody is concerned. So he's been trying to split up some of the responsibilities that the group has. Some of us are willing to take on those in whatever way that we can, and, you know, and at times that we can."

> "Most of it falls on the chairperson. However, it's really critical to be able to pass it out to other members."

> "I have trouble delegating. It's easy for me to say, 'well, I'll do it.' It's easier, and that's the trouble with that. As I progressed as chairman, I found how really important it is to ... pull the

> string, have a conception of what it is, but delegate, delegate, delegate. Set things in motion. Keep it organized."

> "There's really 3 of us who have been really active, other people have been moderately active."

> "Realistically speaking, you're always going to have people of lesser interests involved in any kind of volunteer type situation."

In general, the overall attitude of the members of each commission was not a major issue for interviewees, however some in some cases, attitude was a factor.

> "I guess, most of the other members of the Conservation Commission are extremely rigid in my viewpoint - they're pretty much dead set against everything that would disturb anything."

> "And I think that's the way everything works here. It starts out 'what can we do to work together to meet this goal' as opposed to you will do this, or we won't have'."

Some commissioners described the types of expertise and abilities that they and other commission members bring to the commission.

> "The key thing is that we have a commission that's composed of fairly well trained and committed people."

> "With [another commissioner] and I, we're the only ones who've lived in this area for many years, and I think it's helpful to the rest of them, when they start talking about these different pieces of property, they have no idea where they are and we know and we can tell them - it's helpful, it would be to me."

> "I wouldn't say that there are any real extremes. We don't have anybody who's preaching Earth First and we don't have anybody who's trying to say, 'keep your nose out of it -- less government is good government kind of thing'. It's fairly even handed -- certainly a little more liberal than conservative but it's fairly even handed I would say -- which is good."

> "I was surprised at how many people who were very professional were on this committee. It seems to have a lot of pull or we have plenty of resources to get whatever we need to have done ... We've got the experience right in the committee, which is nice."

> "So we have some intelligent people on the commission, you know they're not run-of-the-mill people, they know what's going on."

Communication among commissioners, in general, appears to be effective and smooth, although some commissioners did report some frustration.

> "Maybe part of that is we seem to have pretty much a singlemindedness. In other words we almost work like one person. On occasion we disagree on some items, but we can usually come to a consensus or agreement, but on most issues we are all pretty much in agreement and work harmoniously and I think that is the key to keeping people on for a long period of time."

> "I think, as a group, we're pretty well in tune. Once in a while, we have a disagreement ... I

just say that it's not complete unanimity, but it's pretty close."

"People are pretty blunt. It's a small group and we've all worked together so long, even to the point where now, if something comes up that the commission wants the support by a letter or could ask for support, that we're so comfortable working together now that one of us can write the letter and either send the letter around before we mail it. There's actually been a few times where we've just mailed the letter and told people after the fact, because we know each other's thinking so well."

"It can be frustrating at times depending on people's level of communication and the skills within the commission."

According to some interviewees, commission meetings are not as structured as they would have liked, although others reported satisfaction with the way meetings are run.

"We go over the Selectman's minutes and the Planning Board's minutes to see if they've done anything that calls for our attention and they haven't brought it to our attention. And then we just talk about a whole range of topics that are going on around town. Discuss any communications ... There's generally quite a lot to talk about."

"My one complaint is that they are always too long. We can do the stuff that we do in 40 minutes, but sometimes we take two hours."

"I think it was mostly because we tried to act as a group, for the most part, and talk things over, and we did that pretty well together. And, of course, since we all worked and had busy family lives we tried to be very efficient in our projects on the commission. We got as much done in a meeting as we could and if we needed to go on a site walk, we'd schedule it and go and do it and follow up independently, if that was necessary."

"We tended to start talking about every other subject -- sometimes the meetings went on twice as long as they really needed to. But, at that point, for the most part everybody just enjoyed seeing each other again and talking, because we did have a lot of common interests."

"Well, I think sometimes, I would say the issues that come up, maybe too much is scheduled for one meeting."

Many commissioners report that meetings are enjoyable because they are relatively informal.

"One of us reminds us every so often about parliamentary procedure ... "

"We sort of understand the formalities involved even though we don't observe them. We keep minutes but we don't necessarily call the attendance and make motions and second motions – we just sort of bat it around and then it happens. So we have rules but not necessarily too structured."

"It's a relaxed type of commission and a fun commission without a lot of the political protocol that goes on in some of the other departments, like with the Planning Board and the Zoning Board."

> "Not only do we take care of our responsibilities to the commission but it's a nice thing to do. To get together with this group -- I like them all. So it's fun."

Several commissioners reported that the energy and activity level of the commission was cyclical.

> "Anywhere from zero to an entire week of doing nothing but that. Our commission had times of being very active and times being very inactive. There were times when we didn't even meet at all."

> "There's times when I've had a lot of energy for it and there's times when my energy is really waning."

> "I have to really say that we're probably reasonably inactive - we wax and wane, and we're on our waxing mode right now. We wane for about a year, year and half, where we really didn't do very much."

> "It's very flexible. Basically, what we do is we talk out ideas at our meeting and the new people come in and they've got a pet idea ... you get a person who's interested in a specific project, and there's some energy built in there. That may decrease a bit. And then, you bring somebody in who has some energy, maybe in a different area, but it gets you back energetic again overall."

Commissioners pointed out the importance of individuals finding particular niches within the commission.

> "So, I think the balance fits really well because each person takes their little portion ... When something comes up, right away they say, 'Oh, so and so, do you think ... ' because they know that person's more involved in that particular subject. And they ask them first if they're willing to take it on -- if not, then it goes down the row. But at least you have somebody who is more or less an expert in that particular field, so it plays off of each other."

> "In our town the reason why certain things have gotten done is because individuals have had a particular interest."

New commissioners reported different degrees of integration into their commission.

> "I know that these people are all really giving and so I think it's going to be easy. I'm not intimidated at all and if I don't know something, I'm happy to say, 'I don't know', and I know that they won't giggle behind my back or anything. They'll help you out, they're more than happy to explain things. I'm looking forward to it -- just got to get the momentum going."

> "There is a lot of interest, good people. I still haven't found my role there - I'm not sure I have one."

> "I'm just not active in the commission at this point. I've tried to poke my nose in a couple of times and I found that it was somebody else's domain and they really weren't interested in what I - they had things under control. So, that's fine with me ... There are certain things -- new things -- that come along that are shared."

Vermont

One of the more common patterns is the recognition that for a commission to be sustainable and effective, individual commissioners need to find a role for themselves that fits their personal interests and skills.

> "And so people sort of carve out their own little niches, which is sort of what I had hoped for the conservation commission."

> "We found that we need as a commission to fulfill each of the members desires and their wishes. Like if they want to do planning a nature trail. We'll discuss this and if someone has a lot of energy for this specific project, by all means, go ahead with it or, you know, give approval for that one person to work on the project that they have a lot of energy for ... it's mostly directed by individual interest."

Some commissioners described their commission meetings as lacking focus or structure, while others perceive their meetings as more productive.

> "I think we pulled back from monthly meetings because we found ourselves meeting and sitting around the table and perhaps not advancing the issues particularly, but just chatting about conservation issues, and thought, well, are these meetings the most productive use of our time, let's meet quarterly."

> "I think [the chairman] is trying to get it more focused that it was. We're often apt to just come and chat about our wildlife sightings. But I think it's a pretty democratic open discussion and people feel free to disagree, you know, without personalities entering, so it's a very fair, open-minded discussion, yes. I enjoy it."

> "We look at it as a time to gather. We rarely talk socially ... we have a set agenda, we generally stick to that, but every once in a while social quirks will come in and we will sit around and ... we all make it fun ... Each of us work outside the meetings. None of us want more meetings, so we've gone to once a month. We assign our tasks during that month, so we each have varying amounts of time on projects."

> "Sometimes no decision is made, which is part of the frustration and we can talk and talk and not a decision is made. Not, we are going to do this, but it would be a good idea to do this. So we did last time talk about being more active and reorganizing in the sense of having a formal meeting and then a working meeting. If we aren't going to work, we're not going to have that second meeting. So, less talk, more work."

In many cases, commissioners described positive feelings about the general group dynamics of their commission.

> "I think there is respect among individuals on the board ... Well, there's caring. We have pretty good attendance. We do seem to, overall. Which you don't have in a lot of groups."

Community Outreach

New Hampshire

Achieving credibility with town residents emerged as a common theme in the interviews.

> " ... you've got to have good public relations and I think that put a lot of people in the affirmative with us."

> " ... I felt it was important for us to establish credibility. We are a body that operates in a thoughtful, careful way and the views of our residents are really important to us to know."

> "We didn't want to be perceived by the townspeople as being much more conservative than the wetlands bureau -- we wanted to be seen as people who could help them through the permitting process. So, we never really enjoyed pointing out violations. Our approach would be to stop in at the landowner's home and say, 'we've noticed, just driving around, that there's a wetland fill here and we know that there hasn't been a permit application because those all get passed along to us and we haven't seen one yet. Would you like us to help you fill out an after-the-fact permit application?'. And we try and take that helpful approach -- it's more effective, better relations."

Some commissioners described public events that their commission had organized. In some cases, public participation was relatively low.

> " ... we had a public hearing and public hearings are generally poorly attended, you know. Very few people come. Only those people whose land is involved and they feel threatened by another regulation."

> "We have sponsored a few public meetings. We are aware, as a commission, of offering things to the town. We had our bicentennial 2 years ago and we sponsored a photography contest with food and fun for everybody, and we purposely did it to make the town aware that we were here ... But we are aware that's a good thing to do, to freshen the town's memory that we're here."

> "At the initial meeting we must have had probably 20 or 30 people which was, to me, outstanding. And then, at the site walk, I'd say we probably had 15 or 20 -- we had a troop of girl scouts that was very interested. When it finally got down to the final meeting where we sat down with Audubon and said here's our assessment of the draft manual and how things went, I think there were only 4-5 of us. So, it went from excitement down to a core group of people who pursued it."

> "We've done a little bit of outreach type work -- I guess the best way to say it is that we're a little discouraged about the efficacy of that work. We find it so much more effective just to get dynamic people and work behind the scenes. If you uncover in your work some ways to get the public interested, I'd love to hear about it."

Several commissioners pointed out that their commission had low visibility and/or negative attention.

> "Our visibility is low ... Most of our exposure is negative. We're responding to a complaint, the complainant is usually unhappy, but the person you're going after is usually the one who is going to make more noise."

> "I don't think we do enough to publicize just exactly what we're trying to accomplish, because there isn't anything, as far as I can see, that anyone would object to. I think the worst thing is that people don't understand us ... So, if we have a project and we should get it into the paper, and we haven't done too well at that."

> "The more the people know about us and know about what we're doing, it might eliminate some of the problems that we'd have to deal with. If people are aware of protecting the wetlands or the conservation use ... Definitely, there's always a need for education on that end of it."

When asked to describe how they thought town residents perceived the conservation commission, many commissioners were not sure what that perception might be.

> "They may think of us as 'tree huggers', I don't know. I don't think that they consider us very seriously or think very much about us. I don't think we're an important commission as far as the town is concerned."

> " ... perception could be anywhere from buffoons and tree huggers to wonderful, caring people. I think, all in all, they just accept us as other people in town. From my own experience, I can't think of very many occasions when stuff happened that the commission was involved in where anybody went away with a bad taste in their mouth."

> "There's a fair number of people in town who may not like us -- perhaps a small number of people -- but they don't trust anyone from the so-called environmental, the green side of things. That's unfortunate but, in general, people let us know what's going on. If they don't like something, they let us know about it."

> "I don't imagine we're pleasing everyone ... but, I think overall from what I've seen, we have a good track record. We responded, maybe not always to their satisfaction but at least we've responded and we've gone out on site to see the particular project and problem and, if there was a legitimate problem, we try to tend to it. So, I think overall, we have a good reputation ... I think we're visible ... they see the Town Annual Report, they see we've been involved in different projects, so there hasn't been a controversial situation where we've come out in not very good light."

Some commissioners reported difficulty finding ways to communicate with town residents, and their reliance on word-of-mouth to take in and send out information.

> "We used to have a town paper, and now, because it's a regional paper, these sorts of issues don't seem to hold a significant interest for the editor, I don't think. There aren't really good vehicles for getting the information out to be honest with you. I'd say meetings and word-of-mouth are probably the primary means of communication."

> " ... we wrote letters to the editor presenting our plans ... I wrote one, I remember [another commissioner] wrote one ... we didn't all hit at once -- maybe [another commissioner] did it one week and I'd wait two weeks before I came in and I'd write one."

> "A lot of it is word-of-mouth -- I can't think of any publications that the commission may have issued to the entire town. In a town this small, word gets out -- it gets around very quickly."

Vermont

Several commissioners bemoaned their low profile in town.

> "They don't know we exist. In spite the fact that we have in the town report, we have a page and sometimes we have a line item. Most people don't know we exist ... We should be doing

more outreach, which is part of why we did the brochure, because we realized people didn't know who we are and what we did."

Several commissioners described their efforts to communicate with town residents about the commission's role and authority.

> "I think when we first got started, it was, 'oh, another commission in town that's going to tell us what to do what we can and cannot do on our land', and we made a real point of doing a lot of community outreach, and advertising as much as we possible could, publicized as much as we could in the paper, giving them lots of information and energy tips, and things like that, trying to be a good neighbor for the first year or two ... We're not here to tell people what they can and cannot do. We don't have those powers."

> "Since we are new, I think the community was vague in our purpose, and I think there was some confusion about our quote, 'power', which is nil. We don't have any power. I think when we presented things I think people sometimes felt threatened by it. This is my land. Don't tell me what I can do on it. Just by maintaining and meeting and having open discussions. I think it was a way to smooth that out a little bit. Perception was a bit unclear. Still is a little bit."

Achieving credibility within the town emerged as an important goal for several commissioners.

> "I don't think there is anybody on the commission that is a ranter and raver and that helps in terms of credibility. I think a lot of the community just doesn't much care what the conservation commission is doing. We don't have a large budget. We're not impacting people's lives in a big way, but if we do something good they appreciate it ... "

> "Credibility isn't a fair term, but, this is probably common in other towns, too, because I've seen it working with other people, you have to be honest, objective and produce information that's, (a) of use to the town, and (b) and present it in a way that the town can, can understand it and accept it. Otherwise it's sort of viewed as tainted information with a hidden agenda behind it."

Obstacles/Barriers

New Hampshire

Commissioners encountered various forms of public resistance to conservation efforts.

> "I think [our town] still has a pretty -- somewhat intense good old-boy network still. So, there's not a lot of innovative thinking."

> 'Trying to get people to understand that can be a fallacy, increased development leads to more taxes, it tends to lead the other way. So, that's kind of a hard dilemma, to get people to appreciate that more development doesn't necessarily mean better tax rate."

> "One of the long term obstacles, and you can see it throughout the state..is the fact that you have a lot of people who also don't believe in conservation because they view conservation in the same light as current use. They believe that current use is bad because it's taken off

> the tax roles property that could be taxed and be income. But again, I think everything that's been done shows that current use is good ... It slows development and it promotes a better way of life and it promotes conservation but most of the people don't feel that way. So, that's an intrinsic barrier, I think, among a lot of people in the state and in our community."

> " ... we spent a lot of money ... trying to come up with wetlands designation and we did an engineering study and decided all the properties that were to be designated wetlands and we ran into a brick wall at a public hearing and it was one of those things that it could have been a fight that we could have fought our way through, but overall, 'what's it worth', so the commission ... at that point couldn't see the importance of fighting it ... didn't feel it was worth alienating so many people."

Finding sufficient time and money to accomplish commission projects was mentioned by numerous commissioners.

> "But it's getting the commission to a point where they're not crisis management that they can do that kind of planning. A time, money and flexibility issue."

> "Money and time. Individual's time ... believability."

Commissioners reported frustration with the pace of progress in their communities.

> "The pace. I'm used to getting on the phone, getting to business, and goodbye. Up here we talk about things a long time before we get finished."

> " ... just that things take so long to happen because people are so busy. I think, perhaps, if we had more of a schedule to follow about things -- if we had projects more clearly delineated -- we might be able to work a little faster. That bothers me."

Interactions with the state was an obstacle for several commissioners.

> "Probably the biggest frustration in this whole commission and serving on it, is the slow action from the Wetlands Board in Concord. Slow, and then sometimes they don't quite understand it ... they've gone against us on one or two occasions -- it just seems so foolish. I recall once ... we had a fellow come up and went through the whole thing with him, understood it, we thought he had a wonderful time. When it came time for him to vote, he voted against it -- against our position. We couldn't believe it! ... We've gone down, at least on two occasions ... to Concord and participated in hearings ... we went to speak against it, and they allowed it, and we just couldn't understand how they could do this. We were the people on site. We knew it well."

> "I guess one of the sources of frustration for me, and I know for the other members, was finding violations in the town and alerting the wetlands board of the violations and having absolutely no -- or very limited -- action or a convoluted assessment of the problem by the state -- that's pretty critical."

> "We have one repeat offender in the town. He drove us all crazy with repeat violations and it just became frustrating to us that it took so long to get any kind of response from the state to even come out and look at a violation. Sometimes they would waive a fine, even though this had gone on several times in the past, or they would just kind of let it ride. And it was in the violators' best interest to do the violation, basically, and get his project done because the

financial penalty was not enough to make a difference. That became difficult."

Other commissioners pointed to property rights sentiments and development pressure and key barriers to local conservation.

> "There are people who are dreadfully afraid of their rights stepped on -- people who live along the river, farmers, hunters -- they're so afraid it's all going to be taken away from them that they bristle about things."

> "As you can imagine there are a number of different opinions about the use of land. We have obviously developers in town who would love to see this town developed to the extent practical ... But I wouldn't want to see that at the expense of some of the beautiful, scenic environments -- pasture land and hills in this town, as well as some of the wetlands that are critical wildlife habitat. So, that's probably a big challenge that we have to deal with. We haven't really come across that, yet."

Vermont

Several commissioners described the scope of the barriers that they encounter.

> "Certainly money. Politics. And maybe sometimes we ourselves can be an obstacle. What I'm saying there is that sometimes we're sort of the politics here. Everyone seems to think that they know how things should be, and if you don't move a little bit left or right, forward or backwards ... What other obstacles? Time."

Some commissioners reported feeling that the commission's work is ineffective.

> " ... the conservation commission has an advisory role and sometimes I question, you know, whether my time is being spent, you know, well spent. But you see little steps moving along and if we all had more time to, to dedicate to, to it maybe we could get things done faster, but it's not happening that way. At least in our town."

Apathy or uninvolvement on the part of other community members emerged as a major theme in commissioners' comments.

> "I think maybe a little bit of apathy on the part of the community because they're accustomed to having it good. It's a beautiful community ... We haven't had a really volatile, hot button kind of issue where we've had to rally the community on short notice around a conservation crisis. So, the apathy manifests itself to things like our cosponsoring some ... workshops and having only a handful of people show up. You know, just feeling as if our work is kind of low key."

> "Lack of interest. Lack of willingness to get involved."

> "I think there's an interesting problem when you have tons of environmental magazines about programs, activities around, everybody is filled up with these magazines and their interest, but there's a big distance between what you can do and when to do it locally."

Several commissioners were aware of the pitfalls of serving on a volunteer commission.

> "The problem has always been kind of a situation where a group of people who volunteer

> and work hard and believe in the community at large and a lot of people who don't, and the same people volunteer over and again, so you are preaching to the converted and other people don't participate. It's hard to get them open. It's hard to communicate with them. They don't have the time and it's a real problem. So, there's always been kind of a division in town."

> "I think it has to do with the fact that we are a volunteer commission. These people have little experience in tackling these bigger planning projects, and it comes down to time. I mean, these are people who work full time for the most part and they are already so stretched for time and to take on a huge project that would involve a lot of their free time, I think that's a lot to ask. I think that's probably the biggest thing, is the time."

> "Nobody is asking you to tell us in your words what you are doing. You don't have the feeling that other people are genuinely interested ... There's a great deal of paternalism. The way that all the professionals get funded through programs is to let the volunteers do the real work."

Property ownership patterns and property rights sentiments were reported as obstacles to local conservation efforts, as well as development pressure combined with town residents' resistance to planning.

> "And when you look at who owns the property in town. That and other conservation projects have made the commission seem like they might not be pulling in the same direction as a lot of people in town with a lot of pull. Sort of rubbing the wrong way."

> "Property rights."

> " ... we're the next town and we're the next domino in order and there's just a lot of town planning and conservation issues that need to be saved now and the difficulty is trying to get people to anticipate these things before they become a crisis or before your town has effectively been planned for you by a series of self-serving developers who have only their own pocketbooks in mind. In that your town just sort of grows like topsy in all direction whatever way the development dollar looks like it would bring in the best return. But people are, especially the old-timers in town, just don't want to confront that, or can't seem to to confront that issue and face it and as a result they simply see any of these issues as just another attempt to control what you do with your own land which they oppose in principle."

Making Use of Information Resources

New Hampshire

Overall, there were numerous comments indicating that access to resource information was not a problem.

> "We pretty much tap into everybody and seek their support."

> "[Our chairman] has been doing this for a lot of years and is extremely well-versed in knowing where to go and who to ask."

> "I've never run into a problem where we couldn't amongst ourselves or across members, get to the information that we needed to know. But we don't have any really big issues."

> "Every time that we have to deal with a new issue, I find myself having to do some background work on it. That seems to be the case with everything that we've come across. Either I'll get that from another commissioner or through the Internet – there's a lot of information out there through the Dept. of Environmental Services in the state. There's access to the information and I know where to get it."

> "I think that gaps do occur, but they're generally very specific. Like, 'who owns that stretch of the railroad' or 'where do we go to get an independent assessment of the herbicides' ... finding out what does a neutral party say would be important."

Commissioners report receiving information in the mail, and in many cases, attempt to review and use the information they have received.

> "When we have a meeting I bring in all the current mail and literature and spread it out and everyone looks at it and then we discuss everything."

> "We get information comes in -- unsolicited and solicited -- we usually put it on the table and look at it. Push it around a little bit. If we think it's important to the town ... of interest to the residents of the town ... we take it up."

> "When there's educational stuff coming up, we always bring that up. And we have a little bulletin board that we put things on that are of interest for anybody coming in. We also have a little library that we've developed that we've made available to anybody to take things out ... all kinds of information in there. And, we really keep it updated -- everything's dated, everything that looks old is taken out. There's some really interesting stuff in there."

Several commissioners commented on the agencies and organizations that they turn to for information.

> "Office of Solid Waste, New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions, [our] Regional Planning Commission, Soil Conservation, used to be called Soil Conservation Service ... We've used them. We also use professional services. We used soil scientists, environmentalists. We also used an environmental attorney."

> " ... everyone is very helpful. I've never met a dead end."

It appears that in many cases, members of the commission are information resource people, either through their own knowledge or through their professional connections.

> "From time to time I'll call Marge about something or I'll call the Extension Service, but not all that frequently. We've been given enough documents and we have enough people, particularly in the past, who were environmental scientists who had been working for the agencies ... "

> "the former chair ... subscribes to a remarkable amount of periodicals and she's always coming in with ... 'hey, let's read about this, look at this, how about this seminar, things like that' ... she definitely had certain things that she wanted to address. It wasn't necessarily local town issues it was more sort of educating the commission. Her agenda, if anything, was to make us smarter – to make us even better of a resource."

Vermont

Several commissioners reported that they rarely encounter difficulty in finding information they need for their commission projects.

> "Where we don't have it from those around the table, we certainly know who to call. The one thing we don't have is a lot of time."

> "We find we get answers when we need answers. There's a lot of agencies out there and a lot of resources out there ... The resources are out there to, to get assistance and to, to get answers, one of the problems is to, to get it smoothly through our own government to, to make it work."

Some commissioners demonstrated some cynicism about the assistance available from the state agencies.

> "There are so many divisions up at ANR that I just lose track of their exact titles."

> "There are lots of things that I expect from the state that I don't see us getting. I guess I don't have very high expectations either, from the state."

Some commissioners report receiving considerable amounts of mailed information and it appears that this information is not always used or integrated into commission projects.

> " ... but I think that we do receive things in the mail. Booklets and what not. Something on forests. Some program that came through. I can't remember ... "

> "We do get a lot of mailings, so we get different activities and different educational things. That's good, but I think there's a lot more information out there that we sometimes just sort of stumble on."

Some commissioners have suggested that they would benefit from additional information about the work other commissions are involved in.

> "The thing that came up at the last meeting was the need to know what is going on in other towns."

Membership Needs

New Hampshire

Numerous commissioners discussed the type of individuals that would be suitable for service on the conservation commission.

> "I think our present group is probably the best group we've had because they know what they're talking about. I don't necessarily mean in a professional sense, but they are committed and they want to become involved. We're probably at our height, in that respect. We've had some people who would come in and just sit for 2-3 years and then get off it and not do much."

> "Not only does a person have to be interested -- a lot of people have interest in conservation -- but they have to have the talent, tenacity and expertise."

> "We all feel, now, that people who come on have got to have some kind of a background in natural resources, the environment, whatever. Or, if they don't have any background, be willing to jump right in and read and learn and go to workshops and do these things to educate themselves ... so, they've got to be willing to put some time into it ... I personally feel very strongly that no one should come on without understanding exactly what's expected of them. The activity fluctuates, but fluctuating sometimes it goes up -- and can go to nothing, too. They really have to be up to date and they have to learn. They have to understand some of the issues."

> "I don't think really it's necessary to have any experience. All you need is the drive and the concern about conservation and we have lots of things for people to do."

> "We have three folks who have retired - older - and I think that there is a great benefit to that. Between the three of them they almost always know the history of a piece of property, or whatever you may be looking at - who owned it or what happened to it or what was going on there. That's just absolutely invaluable."

Several commissioners commented on their commission's prospects for recruiting new members.

> "I think the pool is increasing. Seems like there's a higher level of education in town. And the population seems to be changing -- there's more people here who are concerned about conservation. Maybe they've been elsewhere and seen how screwed up the world can be or a lot of people who have moved here from areas that have already fallen prey to development and don't want to see it happen."

> "Well, we've got a number of new people in town. Usually new blood will do it. You get new people who you can spot as being very interested in conservation and we got to know them and asked them. So, whenever you get new people there's always new enthusiasm that burns up the old blood ... Sometimes it's people coming in and sometimes it's people that we know."

> "But, in terms of drawing people I think, like all government right now, getting the mainstream people involved is just an overwhelming problem. You can't get them interested ... Getting people involved is a real problem. I wouldn't have known that they were looking for people unless my neighbor had said, 'this is what I'm doing and why don't you come down and see what we're doing'. I think that's how everybody who's on there now got involved -- just through personal contact."

Several commissioners discussed the barriers to bringing in new commissioners.

> "It's not a big commitment, but it's sometimes hard to get in the car on a rainy night or a cold snowy night and go down there when you're doing it just for the good of the town -- it's hard to be motivated."

> "One of the problems in recruiting commission members is that folks don't feel that they know what they're doing, and so they tend to leave the commissions. Other than some who have some really strong emotional opinions about one thing or another, it can give commissions a black eye."

> "I think it's kind of tough to have people commit because most people who would willing to do it are also willing to do it for other causes and so they're super busy. People who never commit to anything won't commit to that either."

> "There is never any contention for who is or is not on ... it's not an organization with any real power, so they're not positions that are contended for very strongly and they're certainly not paid so to get somebody to spend time for something that has no authority for which they are not going to get paid, it's a bit difficult to get people to get excited about it."

Vermont

Several commissions appeared to be concerned about maintaining membership levels and the need to recruit new commissioners, although other commissions felt comfortable with their ability to sustain membership.

> "The other thing is we are probably two members down. And somehow we've got to make a effort ... I think just putting it in the paper doesn't really help. You've got to know somebody. You've got to call them personally. Unless someone has a real ax to grind or really hot on something."

> "We won't have any trouble recruiting people to serve on it because we have been careful about restricting the amount of time required ... We haven't riled people up. I don't think its ever going to be an issue about getting people to serve."

Other comments reflected greater concern for the caliber of the individuals who serve on the commission.

> "We've always had a professional representation and we've always had just the right people that have wonderful interests and desires and are willing to work hard ... I think like any commission, or boards or committees, you always could use a wide, diverse people who could lend expertise to a project, all kinds of different areas."

> "It had been full, but I'm not sure that there's really a change, because when I first joined, even though there were all nine members, there were names for each slot, but there was not real consistence of participation. I think maybe when I took over, I kind of resolved it was better to have an open slot that somebody that's not showing up and active ... Hard to get a quorum too when three people never show up. I think it's probably always been difficult and I think that's true in other communities . It's core people who are sort of the ringleaders. But it is possible to bring in new people, and it's happenstance. Who you know, and meet or run into."

Motivation for Joining the Conservation Commission

New Hampshire

Several commissioners described being motivated to join the commission by a desire to serve their community and to get involved.

> "I've always had an interest in serving on a volunteer committee that's related to something that I could help with, that I had the background and experience in."

> "I feel it's a service to the community. I think a lot of the people here, because they work so

> much outdoors and get so involved, that they really do understand the environment but a lot of them still hold on to old-fashioned notions ... I'd like to open people's eyes -- especially if I can work with kids."

> "I thought I'd like to do something within the town to get to know people and help out and the Conservation Commission seemed like a good place to start. It wasn't as political as some other things."

> "I think I was just interested in environmental issues and offered my services if I recall. And knew the people who were serving on it at the time ... I'm the type of person who likes to attend meetings and become a part ... "

It appears somewhat common for a personal connection to draw in new commissioners, as well as interest in connecting with other people in town.

> "The chairman of the commission is a personal friend and they had a vacancy and they wanted me to fill it. My background is all environment and he thought he would corral me for the job."

> "I just liked some of the people who were on it ... I thought it was a good way to get involved in the community."

> "I was interested in getting to know people in town who had similar interests to mine and also to have an opportunity to go out and get familiar with the land and what the development issues were."

> "Basically, my neighbor ... asked me to attend and I attended one meeting and I found that I was on the rails-to-trails committee."

Several commissioners reported that they joined the commission because of their love of the outdoors and their desire to protect the natural environment. Others envisioned working on outdoor commission projects.

> "I've always enjoyed the outdoors and, although I'm not a hunter or a fisherman or anything, I enjoy the outdoors and the beauty of where we live. I'd just like to see it stay that way."

> "I actually wanted to be on it for a long time ... our first president, she mentioned if I'd be interested and I said, yes. Simple as that ... I was really very naive, I was not knowledgeable, I did not have a background ... I thought, 'oh, you get to go outside and do all these wonderful projects'. Of course, it turned out that a lot of our projects were not outdoors but rather discussing things and a lot of telephoning and talking -- not near as much outside as we'd hoped. It turned out to be different but very interesting."

Several interviewees joined the commission in hopes of reversing or preventing environmental degradation.

> "I wanted to become involved. As the years go by, and being older I guess it bothers me more than it does the young people, to see so much of this clear cutting. It bothers me terribly to see this ... And another thing, I think it lowers the water level in the wells. I know it does ... "

43

> " ... to look back and say ... that this land, at one point, was going to be bulldozed or filled, but it's not going to be now. Or, this guy here was going to destroy that farm to put his house in there and that didn't happen -- he's still got his house up, but we worked it out so he could do it somewhere else. I guess, that would be a satisfying thing to feel."

Vermont

Several commissioners articulated a connection to the natural world and a commitment to environmental issues.

> "Through the years I 've always attempted to give part of myself into the picture. I've always felt I've benefacted from the environment. My family and I. I grew up in Vermont. We were always hunting and fishing and we still do today. I feel I should return something back to it."

> "I believe in the issues profoundly. Always done so."

Others described a desire to contribute to their community and a history of community service.

> "I actually applied originally to be on the planning commission, and I interviewed to be on the planning commission, but they chose somebody else, and I really wanted to part of the government in some way. It's my way of contributing to the town and it's also a way to get to know people. And so I was brand new to town, but I really did want to do something so I decided I would apply for conservation commission."

> "I was active in another nonprofit organization. Pre-school for a few years. That closed down so I said I need to find something else. Not that I have time to do anything, but I just thought it was a good idea."

> "I asked. I've always had some role in community affairs. My term on the school board expired and I had to look for an office again, and I had done some work for the planning commission in the past and felt I wanted to do something. The conservation commission had good people and good projects, a place where I could stay in touch and stay involved ... My motivation has to do with my interest in protecting natural areas, animal species and their habitats and making sure they are well integrated into the way that the community goes about its business."

Other commissioners described their (mistaken) belief that they would be involved in hands-on conservation work as a commissioner.

> " ... I thought there was going to be a way of helping out. But I also thought there was going to be a lot more field, interesting field type of projects. Inventorying. We haven't gotten out and cataloged the plants and animals and your areas and so forth. I can see there is a need. It takes a lot of patience because you've got to follow procedure. Being a commission we are strictly advisory. So I guess that's where I was misled on how the commission functions. That's where I'm basically frustrated. More of a hands-on approach. Where you see something that needs doing and go do it. This is my first brush with any type of municipal authority and the way it takes to get something done."

Financial Resources

It is interesting to note that in many cases, individuals serving on the same commission had very different levels of familiarity with the commission's financial resources.

New Hampshire

Commissioners described some of the key expenditures their commission would like to make.

> "Well, I'd like to have more money now. I'd go out and buy more land for sale. If there was a couple pieces of land that maybe abutted up to some other land that we had already, and it came up for auction or something, I would seriously consider going to get it - at least trying to get it. But, I don't think we really have the money to do that now."

> "The big item in our budget that we try to keep a reasonable figure in for ... that's for professional services. Because when a situation does arise ... Well, we can make an educated opinion on something, but we can not make a professional opinion ... but if we have the soil scientist come and declare it a wetland, because he does the necessary testing and says it's a wetland ... then we have something tangible to work from. Or if we need to employ the attorneys for whatever purposes. That's probably the most important part of our budget."

Some commissioners commented that minimal financial resources did not seriously hinder their work, while other commissioners saw this as bigger issues.

> "I think for us, right now ... our funding has been adequate and we work within what we have."

> "Well, we haven't needed any money but we can't buy land or anything like that. We have a small budget ... almost half of it will go to our dues in the association. And we can pay for this map, but we generally use it up. What we would do with more money I'm not sure, because we really don't plan things that are going to take money. Sending people to meetings, maybe."

> " ... for the most part, we've operated on a shoestring without too much difficulty."

> "That's the biggest challenge, protecting land that really needs to be protected. Because, flatly, we just don't have the revenue to do it."

> "Lack of money usually seems to be a big stumbling block. Other than that, I think things are surmountable ... It's just common for there to not be enough money to do a lot of things that people would like to do."

> "We have to be fairly careful -- our budget is absolutely nothing ... there are a lot of workshops and seminars available locally that look really great, and we have to really pick and choose on what resources we get back from them. Do we get written materials? Do we get tapes? What do we get that we can share with everybody? So, we have to be fairly selective on what we attend -- look for the free ones. ... Again, it's the town's perception -- if we ask for more money, they're going to say, 'what the hell are you doing with it -- if you're going to these things, how will we benefit from it?' We're trying to tread on easy ground that

45

way."

Several commissioners described the tenuous balance required to receive funding from the town budget.

> "I would say that, throughout whatever it is that we're doing, the times that people are, that there's controversy, inevitably surround the expenditure of money, the acquisition of property, fiscal matters that people consider to affect them as a tax payer in the town ."

> "We're very careful about any money that we have to work with because it's all out of people's pockets – out of taxpayers pockets. We make sure it's something that we really want to do. That's why we stopped sending kids to camp each summer because we weren't really sure that we were getting a good return for that. Not that we weren't – I'm just not sure that we were."

> "I'm sure you've been to Town Meetings – you know what they're like. If something's controversial, it will get discussed, if not ... One time when I asked for $10,000, it just got voted on without any discussion at all. Everybody knew the project and no one was in opposition to it. People wanted it to happen."

Several commissioners discussed the Use Change tax as a source or financial support.

> "Other conservation commissions ... do have the opportunity of getting funds back from the land use ... And we've tried twice to get that implemented here. Once, I think, it was on a 50% basis and last time I think it was on a 25% basis. Haven't either time convinced people that it was it was a wise move."

> "We're going to try for 20% of the tax penalty - we'll probably get that voted down ... Well, we have a chance, I think. If we get the troops in a spendthrift mode, where they increase everything else ... "

> "I talked to the Town Clerk about the use change tax – I know in many towns the grant is taken out of the use change tax, a certain percentage goes to the commission, and I was told by the Town Clerk there was so little change in the land here it wasn't worth it. "

Some commissioners commented on resistance they have encountered to accumulating funds in a savings account.

> "The problem usually with our budget is they don't want us building a slush fund and they don't want to see us have a budget and then not spending that budget so they have cut it since I've been involved with it."

> "And we ask for money in the budget so that we can put a little money aside so if some expense comes up or some piece of land comes up that we might like to buy the easement or something, we would have a nestegg so that we wouldn't be asking for that money to be raised all in one year. We get no support for selectmen on that and we get very little support from the public on that ... dead set against giving us any money to build up any funds to purchase land or protect land or anything like that."

Some commissioners mentioned other fundraising strategies they had pursued.

> "The only fund raising thing we ever did was an ice cream sale to help to buy the tree for the town, but then we ended up doing that through our county forester. No, it isn't anything we've ever thought about."

> "We went out and scoured everywhere we could to find potential places for grants and we submitted a total of maybe 5 grant proposals over the 8 years that I was involved. Finally got one that went through."

Vermont

There is clearly variation in the level of financial support that commissions expect and receive from the town budget.

> "We don't have funding. We don't. The town just cannot afford to give us any kind of money."

> " ... when the legislature formulated these commissions, one of the concerns was that the tax payers would say, 'Here we go again. The State's going to start this program and then not pay for it, and then it's going to get stuck with the local.' And so there were a lot of people at town meeting even when it first started that said, 'Yeah, and eventually you're going to cost us money.' You know, I mean, you're always going to have that. But I think, for the most part, if this group got into a project that they really felt that the town would benefit from, that they could get the funds."

> "There was a time when the town gave to the commission on an annual basis, this ran for about 3 or 4 years ... These were in great economic times, late '80s or early '90s. I think in about 1991 the bubble burst. Since that time we really haven't had any money. An issue that the Select Board frowned upon. Felt the money could be better spent elsewhere."

Several commissions report holding savings accounts for use when an important project arises -- and the public perception of these accounts.

> "The money we do have is in an escrow account. Is money that is reserved for the purchase or acquisition of land ... We've attempted to use some for parcels of land we thought would be good for the town in the future ... Unfortunately the town, or Select Board, at that time did not want to spend the money. That land is still sitting there. Our hands are somewhat tied."

> "And then others just felt it was a waste of town money to give it for that to sit in an account. And our other point was if we don't have it there, then we can't move fast enough if we have to go back to the town and ask them for money. You know, it would take time."

In some cases, current tax rates and perceptions about removing land from tax rolls create barriers to expanding financial support to conservation commissions.

> "Because taxes are high, people don't want to spend a lot of money for conservation, especially when there's nothing specific to spend it on. Also, there are people who feel that you conserve land, and it takes away from the tax base. And one of the things that we want to have ... we have talked about is building up the argument about conserving land actually preserves our tax base, even if it's not paying taxes. It doesn't require services, like a development requires services."

Some commissioners report that minimal financial resources has not been a barrier to their effectiveness, while others perceive it as a much greater obstacle.

> "In a way I think it makes us more successful. In that we have to be very careful with our funds. In the last couple years that I've been involved I've gone and said, 'we need to have a budget that doesn't increase'. And we've been able to do that. So I think that's good. We've done our own funding of different projects."

> "I don't think it as important, it's not a real important component. I find that people are the most important component to the commission. The money isn't as important. I think you can always find it if you need it. There's always people that are willing to donate when you need it donated. It does handicap you to a certain degree, but it's never been an important component in our commission."

> "Just to send a mailing out ... just the work that goes into getting it organized, actually having it done, copying all the information and so on and sending it out at 32 cents a clip. It's hard to get the information out, because we operate on such a limited budget. Every year we get a little bit of money from the town and sometimes we try to tuck some our information into regular mailings that the town, tax bill, and whatever else may go out."

> "There are things that the commission would like to do that are going to be eliminated or impeded by lack of funds unless we find a vehicle to get those funds and that's just one that came up at the last meeting. It's on our list, but unless we can fund, I mean, it's a very small budget anyway. There is some available funds in the town apparently. And obviously there are grants around, but it puts a damper on doing things when you've got to go and look for money."

Several commissioners voiced their opinions about seeking funds from sources other than the town budget.

> "Personally I hate fund raising. I can't stand that kind of stuff. I don't care. I know it has to be done. It's not my thing."

> " ... and while things were done as a result of the grant, I'm not so sure that grants are all that useful, [that] I would put myself out again for the amount of money that we got ... the excessive amount of paper work ... a $3,000 or $4,000 grant doesn't go very far, and there is a lot of maneuvering as to how we could spend it, and what you could spend it on and a lot of time is spent making all that happen. If you figure at minimum wage it is far, far more than what the grant was worth."

> "I think we have accepted the fact that if we are going to do any projects that require money we'd have to get a grant."

Training Needs

New Hampshire

Several commissioners provided specific suggestions for training opportunities.

> "These are some of the areas I'm not immediately knowledgeable about, the conservation easement process. We really need information on mapping -- GIS mapping, global positioning, whatever that is, GPS I think it's called."

> " ... if you could arrange it where you could put on a 1 ½ hour presentation on a particular subject --'preparing a wetland permit' ... 'understanding topographic maps' ... 'septic system design', 'river front protection' ... They'd have to be regional and almost on a county basis ... And, ideally, there should be no charge or maybe $10 or something like that -- a minimal fee. Possibly, if you could do it like on a weekend and incorporate field trips and things like that, that's very good, too ... I think networking is probably one of the core competencies that should be included. You need to know how to reach out to the public and you need to know - to survey - what the public's interested in."

> "And that's something that new commission members in other places ... don't have a really good feel for. a lot of them, in my experience, feel that they have the power to stop -- that a development needs Conservation Commission approval, which in fact is not true -- not in this state. You seek it so as to make things easier when dealing with the state or the planning boards or whatnot, but you don't need it. Sometimes the Conservation Commission members don't understand that until after they get in and try to put their foot down on something and realize ... "

> "Basically, anything that has to do with the Conservation Commission on the wetlands - anything that we could use here in town. I enjoy going to meetings like that, and any little bit of information that you can pick up is always useful."

> "I know there are training programs available out there -- I think I'd probably go myself through one of those just so I could speak from the position of knowledge and intelligence on issues, rather than offering up bits and pieces like I do now."

> "There's a real need to have a certification process and the process is no different than anyone else if you're going to have credibility. You need to have a certain level of knowledge, skills and abilities to do the job. Whether it's to be on the National Ski Patrol rescuing people off a ski slope or if it's working on a Conservation Commission. I fully believe that a core curriculum is necessary to prepare a commissioner to do their job ... They may mean well, but they've got to have credentials. Otherwise the public or resource professionals aren't going to think much of them. They aren't going to respect them. I may still like to work with them, but it's very difficult. It makes a big difference if you have some type of credential."

Several commissioners identified barriers to participation in training opportunities.

> "I'd love to have more environmental workshops up here. Everything's geared down state, so they have great stuff down in Concord that go on, but not up in the north country - it's just hard to get somebody to do things up here."

> "I think a lot of us get training associated with our jobs and that helps us on the commission but I don't think we spend a lot of time doing commission specific training. It's more, 'there's some money here, if you'd like to go to this annual meeting.'"

> " ... a person could have a full-time job just going to workshops. Anybody who wants to be educated, if they have the time and the ability to get there, all they could possibly want is available to them. It's just a matter of how much interest and time a person has to put into it."

Vermont

Several commissioners pointed to the need for assistance with developing a better organizational structure.

> "I think we need help in organizing."

> "How to run meetings ... We have a time slot and we seem to think we have to fill it. If we are done with business in a half hour we could go home ... The people who serve on the commission are very knowledgeable of the town, but the meetings can hardly get volunteers this day and age. Have to find ways of keeping them. Our meetings aren't productive or it's a big struggle. We're going to lose people."

Some interviewees made suggestions specific to new commissioners' training needs.

> "Some of the people on our Conservation Commission are, they've already been through a lot of seminars. I suppose you could get somebody to, to join the commission as a citizen of our town who it's their first effort to, to work in this direction and in that regard, the various conferences would benefit them ... I don't attend very many of those myself. I think they serve a purpose for people who would be community members serving without prior experience."

> "The other thing that would have helped, to me, personally, is, since this is the first time I've gotten involved with the town politics, is to have a clear understanding of sort of who does what ... exactly what does the planning commission do? Exactly what does the zoning board do? Where does the select board come in?"

Several commissioners pointed to the usefulness of learning what other conservation commissions are working on and networking with them.

> "However, we have found that those meetings with other conservation commissions are helpful because we see what directions they're going and getting ideas for projects that have helped their communities, tell them what we have been doing and it serves as a motivational factor ... if they don't feel like they are getting anything accomplished in the town, and it does take time and patience, they can get frustrated ... this meeting of conservation commissions serves to, to motivate each conservation commission and refreshen them and give them new ideas, and also to, to work together ... I would like to, to see more of that."

> "There's a lot of conservation commissions, and it probably wouldn't be bad if once a year each conservation commission put together a thing, either things they've worked on or whatever ... If I'm doing a wet lands map, if I've already gone through the whole process, and somebody in [another town] wants to do that same process, they should be able to call me up and I'd say, 'oh yeah, here's what you do'. Call this person or do this or do this."

> "You know, you're in a vacuum. You're in your own little group. We have great ideas. We're smart people, but it's good to know what else has been done. What other people are doing. How many people have the exact same problems. How many people have gone through that stuff ... "

> "I'd love to get more communication about what others are doing and how they're doing it and what their strengths and weaknesses are, because I don't thing there's enough shared communication at all. And collaboration with all kinds of state agencies. I don't think there's enough of that either."

Some specific topics for workshops were offered.

> " ... perhaps workshops on mapping, and maybe easier ways to get in touch with people for, you know, the animal corridors and things like that, wetlands mapping, open space mapping."

> "One thing I'm really interested in is natural resources inventory, so workshops on that. Also I think there's sort of nuts and bolts things, like for instance things that you would use to beef up confidence in technical abilities in conservation commissions. Such as, for instance winter tree identification, plant identification, wildlife tracking, things like even orienting, mapping, you know ... things could happen that would make them more confident to go out in the field and try to assess a place ... those kind of skills I think would be really good."

Several interviewees commented on barriers to participating in training opportunities.

> "There was one training workshop on wetlands that I wanted to go to, but it was on a Saturday and I wasn't able to go to it. But there are different ones that have come up. Typically they look like they are good. I'm sure they are good. But it's a matter of time."

> "If you give us lots of paper, I'm not going to read it. I'm just not going to do it. I don't have time. I like things on one side, very concise."

> "You know, they have those town officers' meeting? ... Usually what happens is that we have one, maybe two really pertinent workshops to go to. To get the child care and everything. It's not really worth it."

One individual commented on the need to be inspired to continue to pursue local conservation projects.

> " ... it would also be very good to be spoken to by some passionate planner who says, 'get your act in gear'. This is what you all need to be doing, you know, in a nice way to encourage us to take certain steps or to go in a direction. You have this power. You really could be doing this. Maybe not everybody is doing it, but you could. So, I think, some encouragement to reach higher would be good."

Success and Failure of Conservation Commission Projects

New Hampshire

One of the major themes that emerged from commissioners' comments is the importance of persistence and acceptance of the slow pace of conservation work.

> "Nothing moves quickly. But, by the same token, none of the issues that we're talking about are earth shattering."

> "So, we really don't have many major projects. And the major ones we have just go along very, very slowly because we don't have the resources to put to pushing to closure faster. And, sometimes you just can't push it any faster, because that's the way the legal wheels turn, or whatever -- that's the problem with bureaucracy."

> "As I often say in meetings, it's the water treatment -- drip, drip, drip ... Drip away at it and keep the water dripping. I think, honestly, some of us who have been in the conservation

> area for a while, you realize -- I came in thinking "things were going to change" and then, after a while ... is a critical point where you get really discouraged and think, 'my God, this is endless, there's so much to do'. There's a critical point where you say, 'maybe I'll do something else'. Or, you just figure, OK -- bring this for the long haul. It changes so slow. An individual is nothing -- but hundreds of us working on it, it will happen eventually. Once you start looking on it like that, then you're there for the long haul. Because the person becomes insignificant, but a multitude of effort, eventually something will happen -- things have happened and are happening."

> "I personally feel that this area, of land protection, in this area ... things move very slowly. So much is done just talking to people individually, which is one of the things we really try to do as commission members. Right down to going to the corner store and just talking to people in there. The farmer I buy eggs from, I talk to him.."

> "I think we were pretty reasonable in our approaches about what could and couldn't be done. The town has different agendas towards conservation ... but we certainly got our plan across as much as possible. We didn't get everything we wanted, but we got a lot ... keeping informed and building a working relationship with the town and the Wetlands Commissions and stuff like that ... My feeling was that we could get as much done working -- getting our say in but not necessarily creating a lot of conflict ... I think it was unspoken."

> "There were so many different parts of it and so many different people involved and so many techniques that we used to make it happen over that period of time that it felt really good to get it completely done and to know that it's finished ... I think it was obvious that everyone really wanted it to happen. I can't think of any opposition from anyone along the line."

> "It really comes out of a desire to make it happen. If we have a project that we want to happen than we look into how we can make it happen. Depending on what it is, there's usually somebody to direct you on a path to accomplish it."

Several commissioners discussed the necessity of parceling out tasks in order to accomplish larger projects.

> [Re: Conducting a natural resource inventory] "It was huge. I personally, because I was working at the time, was a little overwhelmed by it. I didn't think it would ever get done and I personally didn't feel I had the knowledge to do it. [Our chairman] really kept after it -- set deadlines, and kept after us to get this done and deadline after deadline wasn't met and she never gave up. She really kept after us. We all were assigned different parts of it to do, then one of us actually did the writing. And then we'd come back and we'd go over the draft again and then we'd go back and write again -- it was wonderful ... I think we all finally came to the point, we've got to get this done."

> " ... instigate and assign things to be done and keep on it. I think that's the most important thing. And the other thing is a project that will inspire people to get out."

A number of commissioners emphasized the role of on-going public relations efforts within the town and beyond in gaining credibility and achieving other conservation objectives.

> "I sort of like the Adopt-a-Highway Program, but that's just trash pickup -- it's really not that big a deal. But it gets our name out there ... In this town, I think, the biggest fear is to be laughed at. The conservation commission is probably taken the least seriously of any of the

> municipal boards ... we have absolutely no jurisdiction. Anything that can give us some sort of basis or respect is a good thing."
>
> "We're fortunate in that we have excellent relations with the media. I think that's key. We continually invite media representatives to accompany us on field trips ... [they'll] write it up in the newspaper and there's other reporters from various papers, including further away, that provide us with really good input. So, we know how to work the media, not only the print media -- the newspapers, the weeklies, also the dailies -- also public radio, the local commercial radio stations ... but the main thing is to keep folks in the loop so that they trust us."
>
> "But, you have to have credibility and, from what I've seen in other communities, many but not all, is that the commission tends to be composed of people who are basically armchair conservationists -- they don't have a professional background, and their background tends to be more from the emotional standpoint. They'll write some articles here or there and they tend to be ineffective."

Vermont

When discussing the effectiveness of a project, several commissioners pointed to the utility of delegating responsibilities to several people, and bringing in professional assistance when needed.

> "It was amazing how effective we were. We just sat around the table and divided it up. Everyone had a section and then we went off and did it and we came back and, you know, the planning commission was so mired in what they were doing, and here we were, we said 'Here you go. We're done' ... It's just a question of packaging it really in a way that makes it doable."
>
> "I think a couple of things. One of them is that two members of the commission really took the ball and ran with it pretty hard and really took it on as their project. The other is that we were able to farm it out to a good professional ... consultant ... that project required a level of expertise that we would have been hard pressed to produce within the commission. If we had had to do that on our own it would not have been completed. It would not have been a successful project at all."

Several commissioners articulated the importance of balancing short-, medium-, and long-term projects.

> "I like to encourage the small projects too, like the planting bulbs. It's just a little hands on thing, but you say, yeah, we did that. It something you can scratch off the list and feel good about. I think a lot of times you can get really mired."

Numerous comments suggested that "chipping away" at projects and issues and taking an iterative approach tended to produce better outcomes than trying to force a faster pace.

> "I think that in the last year and a half the commission has done a lot, and the two years since I've been on it ... Sometimes it seems like we're not getting anything done, but then we sit down and we say, we did that, and we did that, we did that. You know, these are good things."

"You've got to, to work closely with the planning board. They are the ones that actually make the decision and we're advisory, so we have to, to work in our proper context. So, we are going to, to work patiently, through them ... We could present them with a whole draft ... We could drop it in their laps now. That won't fly. We are going to, to take our time. I hope that the other members of the commission have the patience to, to work on this ... I don't know why it has to, to be so long, but town government works that way. It's got to, to go from commission to, to commission to, to the Selectmen, to, to the commission, to, to the town planning. You have to, to inquire from the State if they can do it, then back to, to the Selectmen. Months and months pass. The citizens of the community are wondering what happened ... All things are moving in a positive direction. It's just going to, to take time."

"The work for the planning commission. It was great. I don't like their response to it, but we all learned something and we did give them some really good information. And I think we are on the front of the snow plow in doing it ... we are not going to pursue it any more. We presented it. We did what they asked. They really didn't respond in the way that we expected them to respond, but we accepted their response and now we are going to move on to other things ... We're not mad about it, but I think there was a while that we felt deflated because we had done so much ... There's nothing that we've done that I think was stupid or wasted. Everything that we've done I thought was good. I think the commission is going to do more things."

V. QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

This section describes the patterns observed in the responses provided by New Hampshire and Vermont conservation commissions to the 79 question items in the mail survey. For each of the three question sections, differences observed among New Hampshire and Vermont commissions are reported.

"What Environmental Problems Is Your Commission Concerned About?"

This question was intended to gather information about the types of conservation issues that conservation commissions are aware of and concerned about (as well as possibly interested in working on) in their community. Table 2 shows the distribution of responses provided by total survey sample, as well as the average response value. Respondents were able to choose (1) "extremely concerned," (2) "concerned," or (3) "not very concerned," and the average for each question item represents the average value of the selected responses. Therefore, a lower average indicates greater overall concern about an environmental problem, and question items have been arranged from low to high average values.

Combined Results

At the top of the list we see "Degradation of rivers, streams, lakes, ponds or wetland" with nearly 60% of the responding commissions reporting extreme concern, and all but a small percentage reporting some degree of concern. This is clearly an issue that attracts widespread attention among conservation commissions. "Loss of agricultural, forest, other open land" and "Wildlife habitat fragmentation/loss" also appear to be major issues, with all but approximately 10% of the responding commissions indicating moderate or extreme concern. Approximately 4 out of 5 responding commissions report some degree of concern over "Excessive or inappropriate new development' and "Polluted runoff from roads and other sources."

Conversely, "Backyard burning" is an issue that nearly three-quarters of responding commissions are not very concerned about, although one in twenty commissions report extreme concern. Seven of the environmental problems listed generate concern by fewer than half of the responding commissions: "Inadequate sewage treatment systems," "Loss of street trees," "Traffic congestion," "Loss of historical buildings, landmarks, or sites," "Spreading of sludge/biosolids," "Declining aesthetic quality of village (downtown) areas," and "Existing contaminated sites."

Write-In Comments

Write-in comments indicate that the following issues also generate concern on the part of responding commissions (see Appendix E):

- Lack of recognition by other town boards
- Road expansion
- Liquidation logging practices
- Abuse of current use laws
- Rate of development

Table 2. Responses by New Hampshire and Vermont conservation commissions to the question "What Environmental Problems is Your Commission Concerned About?" Lower average values indicate greater overall concern. (154 cases)

Environmental Problems	average response	% extremely concerned (1)	% concerned (2)	% not very concerned (3)
Degradation of rivers, streams, lakes, ponds or wetlands	1.45	58.2%	38.4%	3.4%
Loss of agricultural, forest, other open land	1.62	46.5%	45.1%	8.5%
Wildlife habitat fragmentation/loss	1.67	43.4%	46.2%	10.3%
Excessive or inappropriate new development	1.78	39.9%	42.0%	18.2%
Polluted runoff from roads and other sources	1.94	25.0%	55.6%	19.4%
Degradation of scenic vistas	2.01	28.3%	42.1%	29.7%
Illegal dumping	2.07	27.5%	38.0%	34.5%
Too little conservation land in town	2.14	17.6%	50.7%	31.7%
Poor management of agricultural/forest land	2.14	16.7%	52.9%	30.4%
Gaps in information about local natural resources and wildlife	2.15	19.0%	47.2%	33.8%
Failing septic systems	2.21	16.8%	45.5%	37.8%
Vandalism in natural areas	2.29	19.1%	32.6%	48.2%
Poor or weak town planning/zoning	2.29	16.8%	37.1%	46.2%
Environmental impacts of town maintenance activities	2.30	14.9%	40.4%	44.7%
Need for household hazardous waste or recycling collections	2.31	16.2%	36.6%	47.2%
Lack of recreational access to river, lakes, and shorelines	2.32	13.3%	41.3%	45.5%
Lack of recreational trails	2.33	12.8%	41.1%	46.1%
Existing contaminated sites (e.g., old mines or landfills)	2.37	16.2%	31.0%	52.8%
Pesticide use on rights of way	2.38	11.5%	38.8%	49.6%
Declining aesthetic quality of village (downtown) areas	2.39	16.2%	28.9%	54.9%
Spreading of sludge/biosolids	2.39	14.1%	32.4%	53.5%
Loss of historic buildings, landmarks, or sites	2.41	11.2%	36.4%	52.4%
Traffic congestion	2.47	12.7%	27.5%	59.9%
Loss of street trees	2.48	10.6%	30.5%	58.9%
Inadequate sewage treatment systems	2.55	10.5%	24.1%	65.7%
Backyard burning	2.69	5.0%	21.3%	73.8%

- Wetland degradation
- Threats to groundwater quality
- Speeding

It appears that the issues that concern commissions are diverse, although some major issues emerge. For all but 2 of the 26 environmental problems listed, one-third or more of the responding commissions expressed moderate to extreme concern. This suggests that few of the issues listed in the questionnaire fail to generate concern among commission towns. However, only a handful of the issues listed generate nearly universal concern. For three-quarters of the 26 environmental problems listed, over one-third of responding commissions reported little or no concern. This suggests that for any given type of environmental problem, it will be relevant to many, but not all conservation commissions.

Differences Among New Hampshire and Vermont Commissions

Although responses from New Hampshire and Vermont commissions demonstrate considerable similarity for many of the question items in this section, there are some exceptions (see Tables 3 and 4). Some of the issues that appear of greater concern to New Hampshire commissions include:

- "Spreading of sludge/biosolids": Over 56% of New Hampshire commissions indicated that they were moderately or extremely concerned about this issue, compared with less than 19% of Vermont commissions.
- "Failing septic systems": Over two-thirds of New Hampshire commissions report some degree of concern over this problem, compared with less than half of Vermont commissions.
- "Too little conservation land in town": Although just over two-thirds of commissions in both states report some degree of concern about this issue, extreme concern was reported by nearly 22% of New Hampshire commissions compared with under 6% of Vermont commissions.

One issue that appears to be of greater concern to Vermont commissions is:

- "Degradation of scenic vistas": Over 55% of Vermont commissions report extreme concern about this issue, compared with less than 19% of New Hampshire commissions. However, nearly 50% of New Hampshire commissions report moderate concern, compared with just over 21% of Vermont commissions.

Table 3. Responses by New Hampshire conservation commissions to the question "What Environmental Problems is Your Commission Concerned About?" Lower average values indicate greater overall concern. (116 cases)

Environmental Problems	average response	% extremely concerned (1)	% concerned (2)	% not very concerned (3)
Degradation of rivers, streams, lakes, ponds or wetlands	1.40	63.0%	34.3%	2.8%
Loss of agricultural, forest, other open land	1.66	44.8%	44.8%	10.5%
Wildlife habitat fragmentation/loss	1.66	42.6%	49.1%	8.3%
Excessive or inappropriate new development	1.79	39.6%	41.5%	18.9%
Polluted runoff from roads and other sources	1.90	27.1%	56.1%	16.8%
Illegal dumping	2.07	28.3%	36.8%	34.9%
Too little conservation land in town	2.10	21.9%	45.7%	32.4%
Degradation of scenic vistas	2.13	18.7%	49.5%	31.8%
Poor management of agricultural/forest land	2.13	17.3%	51.9%	30.8%
Failing septic systems	2.17	16.0%	50.9%	33.0%
Gaps in information about local natural resources and wildlife	2.22	15.2%	47.6%	37.1%
Environmental impacts of town maintenance activities	2.26	15.4%	43.3%	41.3%
Spreading of sludge/biosolids	2.27	17.1%	39.0%	43.8%
Vandalism in natural areas	2.28	18.3%	35.6%	46.2%
Need for household hazardous waste or recycling collections	2.28	17.8%	36.4%	45.8%
Existing contaminated sites (e.g., old mines or landfills)	2.32	16.2%	35.2%	48.6%
Poor or weak town planning/zoning	2.32	16.0%	35.8%	48.1%
Pesticide use on rights of way	2.35	11.8%	41.2%	47.1%
Lack of recreational access to river, lakes, and shorelines	2.35	11.3%	42.5%	46.2%
Lack of recreational trails	2.38	9.6%	42.3%	48.1%
Declining aesthetic quality of village (downtown) areas	2.39	16.2%	28.6%	55.2%
Loss of historic buildings, landmarks, or sites	2.43	8.5%	39.6%	51.9%
Loss of street trees	2.48	10.6%	30.8%	58.7%
Traffic congestion	2.50	12.4%	25.7%	61.9%
Inadequate sewage treatment systems	2.55	7.9%	28.7%	63.4%
Backyard burning	2.73	4.8%	17.1%	78.1%

Table 4. Responses by Vermont conservation commissions to the question "What Environmental Problems is Your Commission Concerned About?" Lower average values indicate greater overall concern. (38 cases)

Environmental Problems	average response	% extremely concerned (1)	% concerned (2)	% not very concerned (3)
Loss of agricultural, forest, other open land	1.51	51.4%	45.9%	2.7%
Degradation of rivers, streams, lakes, ponds or wetlands	1.61	44.7%	50.0%	5.3%
Degradation of scenic vistas	1.68	55.3%	21.1%	23.7%
Wildlife habitat fragmentation/loss	1.70	45.9%	37.8%	16.2%
Excessive or inappropriate new development	1.76	40.5%	43.2%	16.2%
Gaps in information about local natural resources and wildlife	1.95	29.7%	45.9%	24.3%
Illegal dumping	2.08	25.0%	41.7%	33.3%
Polluted runoff from roads and other sources	2.08	18.9%	54.1%	27.0%
Poor management of agricultural/forest land	2.15	14.7%	55.9%	29.4%
Lack of recreational trails	2.19	21.6%	37.8%	40.5%
Poor or weak town planning/zoning	2.22	18.9%	40.5%	40.5%
Lack of recreational access to river, lakes, and shorelines	2.24	18.9%	37.8%	43.2%
Too little conservation land in town	2.24	5.4%	64.9%	29.7%
Vandalism in natural areas	2.32	21.6%	24.3%	54.1%
Failing septic systems	2.32	18.9%	29.7%	51.4%
Loss of historic buildings, landmarks, or sites	2.35	18.9%	27.0%	54.1%
Declining aesthetic quality of village (downtown) areas	2.38	16.2%	29.7%	54.1%
Need for household hazardous waste or recycling collections	2.40	11.4%	37.1%	51.4%
Traffic congestion	2.41	13.5%	32.4%	54.1%
Environmental impacts of town maintenance activities	2.41	13.5%	32.4%	54.1%
Pesticide use on rights of way	2.46	10.8%	32.4%	56.8%
Loss of street trees	2.49	10.8%	29.7%	59.5%
Existing contaminated sites (e.g., old mines or landfills)	2.49	16.2%	18.9%	64.9%
Inadequate sewage treatment systems	2.56	16.7%	11.1%	72.2%
Backyard burning	2.56	5.6%	33.3%	61.1%
Spreading of sludge/biosolids	2.76	5.4%	13.5%	81.1%

"What Frustrations Has Your Commission Encountered?"

This question was intended to gather information about the types of logistical, organizational, communication, and management barriers that commissions have encountered, and would possibly benefit from assistance on. Table 5 shows the distribution of responses provided by total survey sample, as well as the average response value. Respondents were able to choose (1) "extremely frustrated," (2) "frustrated," or (3) "not a problem," and the average for each question item represents the average of the selected responses. Therefore, a lower average value indicates greater overall frustration with a particular type of barrier, and question items have been arranged from low to high average values.

Combined Results

It appears that the most prevalent obstacle that commissions encounter is "Recruiting new commission members," with over 68% of commissions reporting some degree of frustration and nearly 30% reporting extreme frustration. Almost one-fifth of the responding commissions experiences extreme frustration with "Overcoming lack of awareness of costs of development." More than three-fifths of the responding commissions report moderate or extreme frustration with "Finding time for long-term planning/Moving beyond dealing with 'brushfires'." Over half of all responding commissions indicate some level of frustration with "Finding help to maintain trails or conservation lands," "Dealing with weak local environmental protection," and "Finding ways to communicate with town residents." Exactly one-half report difficulty with "Promoting benefits of open space."

Conversely, there are several issues for which less than one-third of the responding commissions report any degree of frustration, such as "Monitoring easements" and "Using resource inventory information." Less than one-quarter of the responding commissions report some level of frustration with "Attracting media coverage for commission events." Nearly 90% of the responding commissions indicate that "Achieving agreement within the commission" is not a problem.

Write-In Comments

Some write-in comments reiterated extreme frustration with recruiting commission members, working with particular state and federal agencies, obtaining town funds for specific projects, and developing clear long-term goals for the commission. Some commission comments make the point that frustration is not relevant because the nature of conservation commission work requires patience. Write-in comments indicate that the following issues also generate frustration on the part of responding commissions (see Appendix E):

- Difficulty getting town funds dedicated to land acquisition.
- Difficulty getting adequate space for commission files/assuring security of files.
- Inability to be proactive rather than reactive to development.
- Difficulty integrating conservation issues into agendas of other municipal boards.
- Failure of select board to enforce municipal policy.
- Difficulty of accomplishing projects as volunteers/Time constraints.
- Lack of administrative support.

60

Table 5. Responses by New Hampshire and Vermont conservation commissions to the question "What Frustrations Has Your Commission Encountered?" Lower average values indicate greater frustration. (154 cases)

Frustrations	average response	% extremely frustrated (1)	% frustrated (2)	% "not a problem" (3)
Recruiting new commission members	2.03	29.1%	39.1%	31.8%
Overcoming lack of awareness of costs of development	2.17	19.0%	45.1%	35.9%
Finding time for long-term planning/Moving behond dealing with "brushfires"	2.24	14.9%	46.6%	38.5%
Finding help to maintain trails or conservation lands	2.35	13.5%	37.6%	48.9%
Dealing with weak local environmental protection	2.36	13.0%	37.7%	49.3%
Finding ways to communicate with town residents	2.37	11.0%	40.7%	48.3%
Promoting benefits of open space	2.38	11.6%	38.4%	50.0%
Prioritizing land for protection	2.43	10.2%	36.7%	53.1%
Obtaining funds for commission projects	2.45	14.4%	26.7%	58.9%
Generating positive responses from the community	2.46	7.5%	39.5%	53.1%
Completing projects on time	2.46	6.8%	40.8%	52.4%
Writing grant proposals	2.47	13.7%	26.0%	60.3%
Finding a focus for the commission	2.52	7.4%	33.1%	59.5%
Dealing with state agencies	2.53	9.6%	27.4%	63.0%
Being unfamiliar with local ordinances or state and federal laws	2.54	7.7%	30.3%	62.0%
Communicating or working with other town boards	2.54	7.4%	31.1%	61.5%
Participating in local planning or development review	2.56	6.9%	30.6%	62.5%
Monitoring easements	2.67	1.4%	29.8%	68.8%
Using resource inventory information	2.68	1.4%	28.8%	69.9%
Attracting media coverage for commission events or projects	2.70	6.2%	17.8%	76.0%
Achieving agreement within the commission	2.86	4.1%	6.1%	89.9%

- Low attendance at commission meetings.

In general, frustration levels appear to be moderate or low. There is only 1 of the 21 question items for which extreme frustration is reported by more than 20% of responding commissions. For only 6 of the 21 question items do we see some degree of frustration reported by more than 50% of responding commissions. However, there do appear to be numerous sources of frustration that commissions encounter. For all but 2 of the 21 question items, 30% or more of the responding commissions indicate some level of frustration.

Differences Among New Hampshire and Vermont Commissions

As in the previous section, we see considerable similarity among the responses in this section from New Hampshire and Vermont commissions with some exceptions (see Tables 6 and 7). One barrier that appears to generate greater frustration for New Hampshire commissions is:

- "Completing projects on time": Nearly 54% of New Hampshire commissions report experiencing frustration with this obstacle, compared with less than 30% of Vermont commissions.

Some of the barriers that appear to generate greater frustration for Vermont commissions include:

- "Finding a focus for the commission": This appears to be one of the most prevalent barriers encountered by Vermont commissions with nearly 65% reporting some level of frustration, compared with less than 33% of New Hampshire commissions.
- "Achieving agreement within the commission": Although less than 22% of Vermont commissions report frustration in achieving agreement within the commission, this is a significantly larger percentage than among New Hampshire commissions (nearly 94% of whom indicate that this is "not a problem").
- "Finding ways to communicate with town residents": Although approximately half of the responding commissions in each state report some level of frustration for this question item, over 22% of Vermont commissions report extreme frustration, compared with just over 7% of New Hampshire commissions.

Table 6. Responses by New Hampshire conservation commissions to the question "What Frustrations Has Your Commission Encountered?" Lower average values indicate greater overall frustration. (116 cases)

Frustrations	average response	% extremely frustrated (1)	% frustrated (2)	% "not a problem" (3)
Recruiting new commission members or volunteers	2.02	31.6%	35.1%	33.3%
Overcoming lack of awareness of costs of development	2.11	22.2%	44.4%	33.3%
Finding time for long-term planning/Moving beyond dealing with "brushfires"	2.19	16.1%	49.1%	34.8%
Dealing with weak local environmental protection	2.33	12.6%	41.4%	45.9%
Finding help to maintain trails or conservation lands	2.34	14.2%	37.7%	48.1%
Promoting benefits of open space	2.37	11.7%	39.6%	48.6%
Finding ways to communicate with town residents	2.40	7.3%	45.0%	47.7%
Completing projects on time	2.40	6.4%	47.3%	46.4%
Obtaining funds for commission projects	2.42	16.4%	25.5%	58.2%
Generating positive responses from the community	2.42	7.1%	43.8%	49.1%
Writing grant proposals	2.43	15.6%	26.0%	58.3%
Prioritizing land for protection	2.45	8.9%	37.5%	53.6%
Dealing with state agencies	2.51	8.3%	32.1%	59.6%
Participating in local planning or development review	2.53	8.3%	30.3%	61.5%
Being unfamiliar with local ordinances or state and federal laws	2.53	7.4%	32.4%	60.2%
Communicating or working with other town boards	2.56	7.1%	29.5%	63.4%
Finding a focus for the commission	2.63	4.5%	27.9%	67.6%
Monitoring easements	2.66	0.9%	32.1%	67.0%
Using resource inventory information	2.68	1.8%	28.2%	70.0%
Attracting media coverage for commission events or projects	2.69	7.3%	16.5%	76.1%
Achieving agreement within the commission	2.91	2.7%	3.6%	93.7%

Table 7. Responses by Vermont conservation commissions to the question "What Frustrations Has Your Commission Encountered?" Lower average values indicate greater overall frustration. (38 cases)

Frustrations	average response	% extremely frustrated (1)	% frustrated (2)	% "not a problem" (3)
Recruiting new commission members or volunteers	2.05	21.6%	51.4%	27.0%
Finding a focus for the commission	2.19	16.2%	48.6%	35.1%
Finding ways to communicate with town residents	2.28	22.2%	27.8%	50.0%
Overcoming lack of awareness of costs of development	2.35	8.8%	47.1%	44.1%
Prioritizing land for protection	2.37	14.3%	34.3%	51.4%
Finding time for long-term planning/Moving beyond dealing with "brushfires"	2.39	11.1%	38.9%	50.0%
Finding help to maintain trails or conservation lands	2.40	11.4%	37.1%	51.4%
Promoting benefits of open space	2.43	11.4%	34.3%	54.3%
Dealing with weak local environmental protection	2.46	14.3%	25.7%	60.0%
Communicating or working with other town boards	2.47	8.3%	36.1%	55.6%
Obtaining funds for commission projects	2.53	8.3%	30.6%	61.1%
Writing grant proposals	2.57	8.6%	25.7%	65.7%
Generating positive responses from the community	2.57	8.6%	25.7%	65.7%
Dealing with state agencies	2.59	13.5%	13.5%	73.0%
Being unfamiliar with local ordinances or state and federal laws	2.59	8.8%	23.5%	67.6%
Completing projects on time	2.62	8.1%	21.6%	70.3%
Participating in local planning or development review	2.63	2.9%	31.4%	65.7%
Using resource inventory information	2.69	0.0%	30.6%	69.4%
Achieving agreement within the commission	2.70	8.1%	13.5%	78.4%
Monitoring easements	2.72	3.1%	21.9%	75.0%
Attracting media coverage for commission events or projects	2.73	2.7%	21.6%	75.7%

"What Strategies Has Your Commission Used?"

This question was designed to elicit information about the types of strategies commissions have used and with what degree of success, as well as the types of strategies commissions are and are not interested in learning more about. Table 8 shows the distribution of responses provided by total survey sample. Respondents were able to choose (1) "used successfully," (2) "used unsuccessfully," (3) "haven't used, but would like to try," or (4) "don't need." No average value is provided as responses are nominal and do not represent points on a scale. Question items have been arranged beginning with the strategies reportedly used successfully by the greatest percentage of commissions.

Combined Results

Of the 29 strategies listed as question items, 11 have been used successfully by 50% or more of the responding commissions, and an additional 16 have been used successfully by more than one-third of the responding commissions. Over three-quarters report that they were able to "Develop good relationships with other town boards" and two-thirds or more were able to "Participate in local planning" and "Bring community concerns to select board and planning commission." A relatively small percentage of responding commissions (15.4%) report that they have been able to successfully "Conduct a wildlife tracking program."

Relatively few commissions report unsuccessful experiences with the 29 strategies listed. For 13 of the listed strategies, 5% or less of responding commissions report unsuccessfully attempting them. Only 3 of the listed strategies were used unsuccessfully by more than 10% of the responding commissions: "Work against inappropriate development" (14.9%), "Draft zoning ordinances" (10.4%), and "Use GIS or other mapping technology" (10.1%).

For 10 of the listed strategies, one-third or more of the responding commissions reported that they had not used the strategy but would be interested to try it. Over one-half of the responding commissions reported interest in trying to "Conduct a wildlife tracking program." Additionally, 2 out of every 5 commissions reported interest in trying to "Develop partnerships with other commissions or organizations," "Implement reforestation or restoration," and/or "Improve wildlife habitat." For 4 of the listed strategies, less than 20% of the responding commissions reported interest, however for 3 of these strategies we see that two-thirds or more of the responding commissions report having used these strategies successfully ("Develop good relationships with other town boards," "Participate in local planning," and "Bring community concerns to select board and planning commission"). The fourth strategy, "Work against inappropriate development" has been tried unsuccessfully by nearly 15% of responding commissions and is seen as unnecessary by over 17%.

Several of the listed strategies generated responses indicating that a noteworthy proportion of commissions perceive them as unnecessary. Nearly 39% of responding commissions reported that they do not need to "Hire environmental consultants." For each of the following strategies, one-quarter to one-third of the responding commissions believe that they do not need to use them: "Implement reforestation or restoration," "Conduct a wildlife tracking program," "Draft zoning ordinances," "Improve aesthetic quality in town," and "Create recreational facilities."

Table 8. Responses by New Hampshire and Vermont conservation commissions to the question "What Strategies Has Your Commission Used?" (154 cases)

Strategies	Used successfully (1)	Used unsuccessfully (2)	Haven't used, but would like to try (3)	Don't need (4)
Develop good relationships with other town boards	76.6%	4.3%	12.8%	6.4%
Participate in local planning	70.0%	5.0%	17.9%	7.1%
Bring community concerns to select board and planning commission	66.2%	6.5%	17.3%	10.1%
Inventory and map natural resources	64.1%	4.2%	28.2%	3.5%
Involve students in conservation projects	64.0%	7.3%	25.3%	3.3%
Promote environmental awareness and action within your community	60.1%	9.8%	24.5%	5.6%
Bring information or resources from state agencies to the community	59.6%	8.1%	25.7%	6.6%
Coordinate environmental services (e.g., recycling, Green Up Day)	57.1%	4.3%	20.0%	18.6%
Promote appreciation and use of town natural areas	54.9%	2.8%	30.6%	11.8%
Monitor environmental violations in town	50.7%	5.2%	25.4%	18.7%
Create recreational facilities	50.0%	3.5%	20.8%	25.7%
Work against inappropriate development	48.5%	14.9%	19.4%	17.2%
Help developers prevent ecological impacts	48.5%	5.9%	32.4%	13.2%
Use GIS or other mapping technology	48.0%	10.1%	36.5%	5.4%
Develop partnerships with other commissions or organizations	47.6%	4.8%	40.7%	6.9%
Develop management plans for town parcels	46.9%	8.3%	33.1%	11.7%
Participate in inter-municipal projects	44.2%	4.3%	31.9%	19.6%
Provide conservation education in schools	44.0%	5.0%	37.6%	13.5%
Improve aesthetic quality in town	43.9%	4.3%	25.9%	25.9%
Raise funds for conservation	43.7%	9.9%	33.1%	13.4%
Monitor water quality	40.6%	4.9%	39.9%	14.7%
Purchase land for preservation	39.4%	7.0%	36.6%	16.9%
Clean up rivers and lakeshores	39.0%	2.8%	36.2%	22.0%
Improve wildlife habitat	36.6%	3.5%	42.3%	17.6%
Hire environmental consultants	36.4%	2.1%	22.9%	38.6%
Draft zoning ordinances	35.6%	10.4%	28.1%	25.9%
Create a commission mission statement	34.0%	6.9%	37.5%	21.5%
Implement reforestation or restoration	22.2%	5.2%	40.0%	32.6%
Conduct a wildlife tracking program	15.4%	7.0%	51.0%	26.6%

Write-In Comments

Several write-in comments pointed out that the success of some strategies currently in use cannot yet be determined (see Appendix E). Write-in comments for this question also provided information about additional strategies used successfully by conservation commissions:

- Utilizing current use tax
- Inviting large landowners to establish conservation easements
- Promoting value of conservation in the community
- Bringing logical scientific and political approaches to planning and problem-solving
- Protecting of wildlife habitat and corridors
- Focusing on one major project each year
- Appointing a liaison to the planning commission
- Pursuing community service projects rather than participating in regulation/zoning

Some commissions wrote in comments about strategies they have attempted unsuccessfully:

- Public outreach events/Community education
- Conservation easements on town-owned lands
- Being proactive rather than reactive
- Obtaining authority to raise funds
- Working with planning and zoning boards

Two commissions described strategies they would like to try, including establishing a conservation district and working with university student volunteers.

We can see from the patterns described above that there is a wide range in the percentage of commissions that have tried different strategies, from over three-quarters to less than 15%. We also see different levels of interest in trying new strategies.

Differences Among New Hampshire and Vermont Commissions

For many of the question items in this section, the distribution of responses was similar for New Hampshire and Vermont commissions (see Tables 9 and 10). However, there were a number of strategies for which New Hampshire commissions reported greater interest or experience:

- "Monitor environmental violations in town": Nearly two-thirds of the New Hampshire commissions report successful experience with this strategy, compared with less than 7% of Vermont commissions. Less than 9% of New Hampshire commissions indicate that they think this strategy is unnecessary for them, compared with 50% of Vermont commissions. Similar proportions (~5-6%) report unsuccessfully using this strategy.
- "Draft zoning ordinances": Over 42% of the New Hampshire commissions report successful experience with this strategy, compared with just over 15% of Vermont commissions. Less than 21% of New Hampshire commissions indicate that they think this strategy is unnecessary for them, compared with over 42% of

Table 9. Responses by New Hampshire conservation commissions to the question "What Strategies Has Your Commission Used?" (116 cases)

Strategies	Used successfully (1)	Used unsuccessfully (2)	Haven't used, but would like to try (3)	Don't need (4)
Develop good relationships with other town boards	78.3%	4.7%	11.3%	5.7%
Participate in local planning	71.0%	5.6%	15.0%	8.4%
Involve students in conservation projects	66.7%	6.1%	22.8%	4.4%
Bring community concerns to select board and planning commission	65.7%	7.6%	17.1%	9.5%
Monitor environmental violations in town	64.7%	4.9%	21.6%	8.8%
Promote environmental awareness and action within your community	62.6%	5.6%	26.2%	5.6%
Inventory and map natural resources	61.5%	5.8%	29.8%	2.9%
Bring information or resources from state agencies to the community	60.2%	7.8%	25.2%	6.8%
Help developers prevent ecological impacts	57.3%	6.8%	25.2%	10.7%
Promote appreciation and use of town natural areas	56.1%	0.9%	28.0%	15.0%
Coordinate environmental services (e.g., recycling, Green Up Day)	54.7%	4.7%	20.8%	19.8%
Create recreational facilities	53.2%	1.8%	20.7%	24.3%
Work against inappropriate development	51.0%	16.0%	18.0%	15.0%
Develop management plans for town-owned parcels	50.9%	7.3%	30.0%	11.8%
Monitor water quality	46.7%	4.7%	35.5%	13.1%
Participate in inter-municipal projects	45.3%	3.8%	33.0%	17.9%
Raise funds for conservation	44.8%	9.5%	33.3%	12.4%
Use GIS or other mapping technology	44.5%	11.8%	37.3%	6.4%
Provide conservation education in schools	44.2%	4.8%	37.5%	13.5%
Clean up rivers and lakeshores	43.9%	1.9%	29.9%	24.3%
Develop partnerships with other commissions or organizations	43.0%	4.7%	43.9%	8.4%
Purchase land for preservation	42.9%	7.6%	34.3%	15.2%
Improve aesthetic quality in town	42.9%	5.7%	24.8%	26.7%
Draft zoning ordinances	42.2%	10.8%	26.5%	20.6%
Improve wildlife habitat	40.2%	1.9%	37.4%	20.6%
Hire environmental consultants	36.9%	1.9%	25.2%	35.9%
Create a commission mission statement	25.9%	7.4%	42.6%	24.1%
Implement reforestation or restoration	22.5%	3.9%	40.2%	33.3%
Conduct a wildlife tracking program	7.5%	6.5%	53.3%	32.7%

Table 10. Responses by Vermont conservation commissions to the question "What Strategies Has Your Commission Used?" (38 cases)

Strategies	Used successfully (1)	Used unsuccessfully (2)	Haven't used, but would like to try (3)	Don't need (4)
Develop good relationships with other town boards	71.4%	2.9%	17.1%	8.6%
Inventory and map natural resources	71.1%	0.0%	23.7%	5.3%
Bring community concerns to select board and planning commission	67.6%	2.9%	17.6%	11.8%
Participate in local planning	66.7%	3.0%	27.3%	3.0%
Coordinate environmental services (e.g., recycling, Green Up Day)	64.7%	2.9%	17.6%	14.7%
Develop partnerships with other commissions or organizations	60.5%	5.3%	31.6%	2.6%
Create a commission mission statement	58.3%	5.6%	22.2%	13.9%
Use GIS or other mapping technology	57.9%	5.3%	34.2%	2.6%
Bring information or resources from state agencies to the community	57.6%	9.1%	27.3%	6.1%
Involve students in conservation projects	55.6%	11.1%	33.3%	0.0%
Promote environmental awareness and action within your community	52.8%	22.2%	19.4%	5.6%
Promote appreciation and use of town natural areas	51.4%	8.1%	37.8%	2.7%
Improve aesthetic quality in town	47.1%	0.0%	29.4%	23.5%
Provide conservation education in schools	43.2%	5.4%	37.8%	13.5%
Work against inappropriate development	41.2%	11.8%	23.5%	23.5%
Participate in inter-municipal projects	40.6%	6.3%	28.1%	25.0%
Raise funds for conservation	40.5%	10.8%	32.4%	16.2%
Create recreational facilities	39.4%	9.1%	21.2%	30.3%
Conduct a wildlife tracking program	38.9%	8.3%	44.4%	8.3%
Hire environmental consultants	35.1%	2.7%	16.2%	45.9%
Develop management plans for town parcels	34.3%	11.4%	42.9%	11.4%
Purchase land for preservation	29.7%	5.4%	43.2%	21.6%
Improve wildlife habitat	25.7%	8.6%	57.1%	8.6%
Clean up rivers and lakeshores	23.5%	5.9%	55.9%	14.7%
Monitor water quality	22.2%	5.6%	52.8%	19.4%
Help developers prevent ecological impacts	21.2%	3.0%	54.5%	21.2%
Implement reforestation or restoration	21.2%	9.1%	39.4%	30.3%
Draft zoning ordinances	15.2%	9.1%	33.3%	42.4%
Monitor environmental violations in town	6.3%	6.3%	37.5%	50.0%

Vermont commissions. Similar proportions (~9-10%) report unsuccessfully using this strategy.

- "Help developers prevent ecological impacts": Over 57% of the New Hampshire commissions report successful experience with this strategy, compared with just over 21% of Vermont commissions. However, more than half of Vermont commissions (54.5%) report that they haven't used this strategy, but would like to try it. Less than 11% of New Hampshire commissions indicate that they think this strategy is unnecessary for them, compared with over 21% of Vermont commissions.
- "Improve wildlife habitat": Over 40% of the New Hampshire commissions report successful experience with this strategy, compared with less than 26% of Vermont commissions. However, more than half of Vermont commissions (57.1%) report that they haven't used this strategy, but would like to try it. Notably, over 20% of New Hampshire commissions indicate that they think this strategy is unnecessary for them, compared with less than 9% of Vermont commissions.
- "Clean up rivers and lakeshores": Nearly 44% of the New Hampshire commissions report successful experience with this strategy, compared with less than 24% of Vermont commissions. However, more than half of Vermont commissions (55.9%) report that they haven't used this strategy, but would like to try it. Notably, over 24% of New Hampshire commissions indicate that they think this strategy is unnecessary for them, compared with less than 15% of Vermont commissions.

There are a few strategies for which there is apparently greater interest or experience among Vermont commissions:

- "Conduct a wildlife tracking program": Nearly 39% of the Vermont commissions report successful experience with this strategy, compared with less than 8% of New Hampshire commissions. However, more than half of New Hampshire commissions (53.3%) report that they haven't used this strategy, but would like to try it. Just over 8% of Vermont commissions indicate that they think this strategy is unnecessary for them, compared with nearly 33% of New Hampshire commissions. Similar proportions (~6-8%) report unsuccessfully using this strategy.
- "Create a commission mission statement": Over 58% of the Vermont commissions report successful experience with this strategy, compared with less than 26% of New Hampshire commissions. However, nearly 43% of New Hampshire commissions report that they haven't used this strategy, but would like to try it. Just under 14% of Vermont commissions indicate that they think this strategy is unnecessary for them, compared with just over 24% of New Hampshire commissions. Similar proportions (~5-7%) report unsuccessfully using this strategy.
- "Promote environmental awareness and action within your community": Although nearly 53% of Vermont commissions report successful experience with this strategy (compared with nearly 63% of New Hampshire commissions), over 22% of Vermont commissions report unsuccessfully attempting to use this strategy, compared with less than 6% of New Hampshire commissions. Similar

proportions (~5-6%) indicate they think this strategy is unnecessary for them.

Who Completed the Questionnaire?

This question was intended to clarify which member(s) of the responding commission provided questionnaire responses. Tables 11, 12, and 13 show the distribution for response options for the total pool of responding commissions, as well as the break-down of response options in each state.

Of the 116 responding commissions in New Hampshire, just under 22% completed questionnaires as a group during a commission meeting. Nearly 57% of the questionnaires returned by New Hampshire commissions were completed by the commission chair and nearly 16% were completed informally by some members of the commission.

Of the 38 responding commissions in Vermont, over 39% completed questionnaires as a group during a commission meeting. Nearly 53% of the questionnaires returned by Vermont commissions were completed by the commission chair and nearly 6% were completed informally by some members of the commission.

Table 11. Distribution of response options for New Hampshire and Vermont conservation commissions. (154 cases)

Response options	Number	Percentage
We completed this questionnaire at a commission meeting.	40	26.0%
The chair of our commission completed this questionnaire for the group.	86	55.8%
Some members of the commission completed the questionnaire informally.	19	12.3%
Other	5	3.2%
No response	4	2.6%

Table 12. Distribution of response options for New Hampshire conservation commissions. (116 cases)

Response Options	Number	Percentage
We completed this questionnaire at a commission meeting.	25	21.6%
The chair of our commission completed this questionnaire for the group.	66	56.9%
Some members of the commission completed the questionnaire informally.	18	15.5%
Other	4	3.4%
No response	3	2.6%

Table 13. Distribution of response options for Vermont conservation commissions. (38 cases)

Response Options	Number	Percentage
We completed this questionnaire at a commission meeting.	15	39.5%
The chair of our commission completed this questionnaire for the group.	20	52.6%
Some members of the commission completed the questionnaire informally.	1	5.6%
Other	1	2.6%
No response	1	2.6%

VI. SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

In this section, we bring the findings from the qualitative and quantitative research components together and compare them to our original five general research questions. Major patterns are listed below each of these five questions.

What strategies do commissioners perceive as most useful for achieving local conservation goals?

- Acceptance of need for slow, iterative development of conservation projects and on-going communication with other town boards;
- Need to "chip away" at major issues and take a long-term view of change;
- Importance of developing relationships and building trust within the community;
- Need to continually balance short-, medium-, and long-term projects;
- Ability to be flexible and try new approaches;
- Importance of delegating and parceling out tasks to commission members;
- Need for on-going community outreach;
- Acknowledgement when outside assistance is needed;
- Acceptance and effective use of advisory role for other town boards;
- Diverse strategies used by commissions;
- Considerable involvement of students in commission projects;

What types of obstacles are encountered by conservation commissioners and how do they deal with them?

- Lack of clarity about role of the conservation commission by both commissioners and other town officials and residents;
- Desire for more state-level leadership (primarily in Vermont);
- Lack of regulatory authority hampers efforts to protect integrity of local environment;
- Lack of time to dedicate to commission activities;
- Slow pace of progress within communities;
- Frustrating interactions with state agencies (primarily New Hampshire Wetlands Board);
- Development pressure and pro-development sentiment within municipal government and the community;
- Variable levels of frustration due to insufficient financial resources;
- Apathy among town residents;
- Weak local environmental laws and poor enforcement;

Do conservation commissioners have the organizational capacity to maintain and expand the scope of their conservation work?

- Different perceptions of individuals within commissions about the appropriate role of the commission (e.g., reactive vs. proactive, avoiding or seeking controversy);

- Some difficulty prioritizing and implementing key projects rather than pursuing many projects ineffectively;
- Unequal sharing of commission responsibilities and project work; Some recognition of need for individuals to develop their own niche and take leadership on projects they are interested in;
- Reliance on strong leadership from chairperson;
- Variable opinions regarding the type of skills needed to serve on conservation commissions;
- Open communication, candor, and respect among commissioners;
- Informal and fun atmosphere at commission meetings;
- Frustration over inefficient meeting structure and resulting wasted time;
- Cyclical energy and activity levels;
- Little structured training offered to new commissioners by experienced commissioners;
- Some vacancies within commissions (especially in Vermont). In New Hampshire, considerable longevity of service;
- Variable perceptions about ease of recruiting new commissioners. Reliance on personal contacts to bring in new members;
- Some disparity between expectations and reality of serving on conservation commissions;

What relationships do conservation commissions have with town residents?

- Confusion about level of regulatory authority commission possesses;
- Some difficulty building collaborative relationships with other town boards; Some efforts to increase interaction through attending meetings and receiving minutes;
- Difficulties encountered due to diverse views on benefits of conservation within communities;
- Variable degrees of credibility and visibility within communities; Some active strategies to improve credibility and increase community outreach;
- Low community participation in commission-sponsored meetings and events;
- Variable access to vehicles for communicating with town residents;

How do conservation commissioners obtain and make use of informational, financial and other resources?

- Relatively good access to information resources from both within and outside the commission;
- Confidence in ability to track down needed information (especially in New Hampshire);
- Variable strategies for sharing and utilizing information mailed to commission chairperson;
- Broad familiarity with various agencies and organizations (especially in New Hampshire);

74

- Considerable reliance on town budgets for operating funds; Variable degrees of support among communities to fund conservation commissions;
- Extreme variability in level of financial resources among commissions;
- Opposition to commissions accumulating funds in savings accounts;
- Some cynicism with amount of work required to get and manage grant funds;
- Enthusiasm about benefits of learning from other conservation commissions;
- Lack of time to attend training opportunities;

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, we offer suggestions for addressing issues identified through the qualitative and quantitative research efforts. The first section provides suggestions for conservation commissions to improve their effectiveness in identifying and achieving their conservation goals. The second section provides suggestions for Extension and other entities to assist conservation commissions.

Recommendations for Conservation Commissions

Role of Conservation Commission

Some conservation commissions are very clear on their goals and mission, but other commissions have difficulty developing a clear focus for their efforts. In any community, there are likely to be more conservation issues than there will be time and energy to address them. Some ways to achieve clarity of purpose include:

- Be clear about the powers and duties of the conservation commission by reviewing the enabling legislation;
- Accept that the enabling legislation is very broad and that there are many different types of projects that a commission can pursue *based on the interests of the commissioners and the community*;
- Beginning with the commission membership, identify areas of concern and skills that individuals bring -- the motivation and abilities that commissioners bring can direct the commission toward likely areas of success;
- Accept that individual commissioners will have different perspectives on the appropriate role of the conservation commission; Consider developing a vision of the commission as a framework from which several types of projects can emerge;
- Systematically assess the community for issues that seem ripe for public support, but have not yet been taken up by other groups or individuals;
- Determine what your community can handle in terms of new environmental initiatives; Discuss within the commission how willing you are to tackle controversial issues ... and your likelihood of success if you do;
- Discuss how much the commission wants to be involved in development review and find out how interested the planning commission and zoning board are about accepting your participation;
- Communicate formally or informally with select board and planning commission members to find out what they see as important conservation issues ... but be wary of taking on a project that is important to these boards if they are not important to your commission;
- Consider beginning with information gathering projects that enable your commission to identify the most pressing conservation problems, and choose to work on one or two at a time;

Whether you take these steps as part of a formal goal setting process or just integrate them into ongoing meetings and projects, they should assist your commission in concentrating its energy on a few priority projects rather than spreading itself too thin.

Working with Other Town Boards

Although some conservation commissions have very stable, supportive relationships with the other local boards and officials in their town, other commissions report experiences marked by miscommunication and confrontation. Who's "right" and who's "wrong" in these situations may be less important than what actual outcomes are in your community. Here are a few ideas for achieving smooth interactions within town government:

- Be aware of the history and dynamics of other boards so that you can avoid being drawn unnecessarily into local politics; If there are individuals on key boards that are staunch anti-conservationists, seek other allies on those boards;
- Consider sending a commission member to selectboard or planning commission meetings as a way to stay current; Alternatively, request to receive the minutes of these boards;
- Be an open book -- let other town officials know before, during, and after a project that your commission is pursuing it; Schedule short "updates" at select board and planning commission meetings and seek input;
- Actively ask about any "red flags" that other town officials perceive -- it's better to know ahead of time that a project may engender enemies (and adapt accordingly) rather than finding out the project is doomed after you've sunk countless hours into it;
- With new initiatives or project ideas, solicit opinions from town officials before staking out a firm commission position; Convey that you are legitimately open to other ideas;
- Be open to other ideas, and really listen to what is being said and why; No one individual or commission can unilaterally direct town government (especially the conservation commission!) so compromise is the name of the game;
- When a successful project is completed, publicly acknowledge the support you received -- You'll be more likely to be supported on your next project;

Working Well As a Group

There is no one right way for a conservation commission to operate. Organizational structure and culture will largely be determined by the community and the individual commissioners, and may change over time. Like any other aspect of your work on the commission, setting up and maintaining a functioning group process takes time and energy. Why not put the time in so that you can avoid miscommunication and frustration down the road? Here are a few basic ideas:

- Discuss what level of formality you want at your meetings and decide whether to use a facilitator and an agenda at each meeting (strongly recommended!!);
- Starting and ending on time can be very important to keep attendance high at meetings;

- Discuss and define when consensus and voting procedures come into play to make decisions; Clarify what these procedures are;
- Choose a sustainable, productive work load and meeting schedule; Don't overestimate what commission members can give to this volunteer commitment;
- Consider developing a brief written list of membership expectations;
- Welcome individual initiative and allow it to shape the direction of the commission to the extent that this is sustainable; Be wary of juggling too many different projects at one time, however, and seek to combine short-, medium-, and long-term projects so that there is periodic accomplishment and completion;
- Encourage participation by everyone in the group, but accept that, for a variety of reasons, it is common for some commissioners to take on responsibility than others; Experiment with ways to integrate new or "low time commitment" commissioners into projects -- experiencing successful involvement can lead to increased incentive for participation and leadership down the road;
- Encourage each commissioner to seek their niche based on their interests and expertise (e.g., taking leadership for an annual event or becoming the commissioner "expert" on a particular issue;)

Developing Credibility with Town Residents

Some conservation commissions are well-known, integrated community fixtures, but many commissions struggle with lack of awareness or support for their efforts. A little bit of community support can go a long way to getting your line item in the town budget or "greening up" your community's roadways. Some ideas for building community support include:

- Make conservation commission activities well-known by posting meeting minutes at the town office, seeding notices and articles in the local newspaper, and submitting an annual update in the Town Report;
- Talk up commission projects with friends and neighbors, and ask them to spread the word; Solicit their opinions about current and future projects;
- Pursue alignments with well established groups in town such as Scouts, the fire and rescue committee, school and parent groups, church groups, and lake associations;
- Seek ways to bring conservation issues into the agenda of existing community groups and events;
- Hold events in public buildings such as the town library, the school, or the town hall and publicize them through posting flyer in stores and public buildings and sending notices home with schoolchildren;
- "Introduce" town residents to "hidden" natural treasures by offering natural history walks;
- Try to have one high profile project going on most of the time so that the commission has a consistent presence;
- As a commission, seek consistency in the activities you engage in and the messages you send out to the community; Over time, this may increase awareness of and appreciation for the commission's role;

78

Overcoming Barriers

Conservation commissions can encounter any number of barriers to their efforts, and the challenge is to figure out how to go under, over, or around these barriers (and when to move onto something else.) The sooner you recognize a barrier, the easier it may be to plot your course around it.

For example, many commissions encounter resistance from members of their community who advocate for the primacy of economic development and private property rights.

- Initiate a dialogue within the community about the costs and benefits of economic development and the tradeoffs between an increased tax base and potential increases to required town expenditures;
- Participate in promoting ecologically low impact economic activity (e.g., many forms of agriculture, reuse businesses;)
- Very clearly demonstrate the public benefits to be gained from any ordinances or programs that pertain to privately owned lands (e.g., cleaner streams, protection of drinking water supplies, reduced flood potential;)
- Cultivate relationships with large landowners in town and seek to understand their concerns prior to proposing new ordinances;

Other commissions report feeling ineffective due to insufficient time and/or money and apathy in the community. To some degree, these obstacles can be mitigated by choosing focused projects that build on your strengths.

- Until your commission has a strong base of funding and/or a broad network of volunteers, choose smaller projects that don't require large amounts of money or time; Alternatively, pursue major, long-term projects and develop an extended timeline for achieving your objectives;
- Begin your community outreach efforts by identifying groups that are already active in your community and building partnerships with them rather than trying to stimulate involvement by individuals who haven't yet developed a pattern of community involvement;

Getting Help From Outside Your Community

Some conservation commissions find that they have more than enough information and assistance from regional and statewide agencies and organizations, but others feel more removed from these resources. Access to the types of information and help you need, when you need it, can not only make your commission more confident about taking on community projects, it will make those projects move forward more efficiently. Some strategies for getting outside help include:

- When your commission identifies an issue that it plans to work on, start a file to house information resources you obtain and names and phone numbers of individuals you contact at agencies and organizations;
- Consider setting aside a short period of time during each commission meeting to

quickly review materials mailed to the commission chairperson; Set up a basic filing system for storing this information, organized by subject, so that you have a variety of information sources at your fingertips if and when you need it;

- Identify a single commissioner to initiate and maintain communication with particular departments and organizations so that this person can develop familiarity with key people; This can help get phone calls returned more quickly and help often overburdened agency staff to feel like they aren't starting from scratch each time they speak with a new person from your commission;
- Be clear about what information and help you need and ask for it directly; Let agency staff know that the time they spend assisting you will not go to waste because your commission is pursuing a realistic project;
- If you would like agencies or organizations to send specialists to your town, organize a multi-town meeting so that it is clearly worth the drive for them because they will share information with several communities at one time;
- Identify town residents who have specific training or expertise and request their assistance on appropriate projects;

Recruiting and Keeping New Commissioners

Most conservation commissions will, at one time or another, experience low membership and energy. Although this can occur as part of a natural cycle, it makes sense for a commission to continually bring on and integrate new members. Here are some ideas for recruiting and keeping new commissioners:

- Know key areas where help is needed and identify individuals with these specific skills; Call them and tell them why you would like them to serve -- If they decline, call them again next year;
- Be clear about the responsibilities and options; Explain the baseline obligations and encourage individuals to allow their interests and schedules to determine their level of involvement;
- Ask an experienced commissioner to be a mentor to a new commissioner and to explain the history and current projects of the commission;
- Ask new members to take on a task that is part of an existing project and explain where the task fits into the overall effort; Choose a project that is already going well so that the new member's first experience is a positive one;
- Encourage new members to participate in discussions and decision making early on so that it is clear that they are expected to take on leadership roles within the commission when they are up to speed;
- If your commission has several vacancies or is just forming, you may have a less clear idea of the type of person you would like to recruit, and simply want to increase participation; Some of the types of people that may be interested:

-retirees/senior citizens
-part-time workers
-students
-people in transition (recently widowed, divorced; "empty nesters")
-community newcomers
-seasonal homeowners (short-term projects)
-career changers

-homemakers
-people with flexible schedules (free lancers, consultants, substitute teachers)
-members of groups
-families/parents
-singles
-professionals/people with specific skills

Identifying and Meeting Your Financial Needs

Conservation commissions vary tremendously in the financial resources they have (and feel they need) to implement their conservation objectives. Here are some suggestions for maximizing your commission's ability to cultivate and manage the funds they need:

- Develop financial goals that are closely tied to your commission's conservation goals; Avoid pursuing grants funds that don't relate to local needs;
- When requesting town funds, cultivate support long in advance and demonstrate specific, realistic plans for use of funds; Be conscientious about use and management of funds in order to justify future support;
- When seeking grant awards, be wary of taking on too much responsibility for too little money;
- Evaluate whether local fundraising events such as bake sales or plant sales meet your expectations and decide whether they merit repeating ... but take into account that community awareness benefits can be great; Be creative in seeking support from local businesses or individuals; Consider periodically dedicating commission meeting time to brainstorming new sources of funds;
- Keep all commissioners up to speed on commission financial resources so that as experienced commissioners retire from the commission, newer commissioners can take on financial management responsibilities;

Seeking Training

Individual commissioners bring a wide variety of professional training and personal experiences that can assist them in their work on the conservation commission, yet most can benefit from additional training specific to their commission activities. New commissioners may benefit from general information and technical training, while experienced commissioners may benefit more from networking and inspiration from others. Time and money spent on training can be most effective with some planning.

- Commissioners can review workshop and conference announcements mailed to the chairperson to find out about the types of training that is available;
- Commissions may choose to send one or two commissioners to workshops and ask them to gather handouts and report back on information obtained;
- Commissioners can choose training opportunities that are closely related to current and future commission projects;
- Commissioners can provide their own training through review of available

materials (e.g., handbooks, local ordinances, commission files) and by asking questions of experienced commissioners;

- If you find that specific types of training are unavailable, contact your state conservation commission association, Extension, and others and ask them to provide training sessions that you feel you need;
- Organize or participate in meetings with neighboring commissions to gain tips, ideas, and information;

Getting Projects Started ... And Finished

Many commissioners bemoan the slow pace of progress they experience as they encounter various roadblocks to their efforts. While it is important to acknowledge that change takes time, it is also important to have a plan for pushing ahead. Some basic steps for getting things moving forward include:

- Put in the time to effectively plan your project, develop an approximate timeline, define expectations, and bring in program partners;
- Be clear about who is designated to coordinate a project and be sure that person delegates tasks rather than taking on the whole thing;
- Continually nurture partnership relationships through communication and acknowledgment;
- Seek publicity – the attention and energy you can attract through the media can go a long way to building community support and maintaining momentum within the commission;
- Be flexible! As roadblocks emerge, decide whether going over, under or around is an option; If not, take an alternate route;
- At the end of a project, take some time to discuss (and write down) what went well and what you would do differently – the next project you take on will benefit from it;
- For long-term projects, be aware that much of your success will result from "chipping away at issues" rather than dramatic changes;

Recommendations for Extension and Other Helping Agencies

There are numerous avenues for Extension and other organizations and agencies to help conservation commissions become aware of and implement the strategies outlined above. Here we offer suggestions for actions that Extension and its partners can take to improve the effectiveness of conservation commissions:

Organizational Development/Community Outreach:

Many commissions would benefit from improved organizational dynamics and group process skills, as well as assistance in communicating effectively with other town boards and residents. Extension and its partners could:

- Provide presentations at the annual meetings of statewide conservation commission associations on "Building Effective Boards;" These presentations could focus on organizational skills outlined above;
- Provide facilitation services for town-based "all board" meetings designed to identify barriers to cooperation and resolve conflicts among the selectboard, planning commission, conservation commission, etc.;
- Offer workshops, presentations, and reference materials on conducting community needs assessments and implementing volunteer development strategies;
- Offer regional leadership development training programs to expand the pool of community leaders available to serve on local commissions;

Natural Resources and Agriculture:

An understanding of natural resource and agricultural issues and processes is inherent to the work of most conservation commissions. Extension and its partners could:

- Continue to providing general technical assistance with natural resource and agricultural issues;
- Offer workshops, presentations, and reference materials on implementing and utilizing natural resource inventories;
- Compliment conservation commissions' efforts to maintain open farm and forest land in their communities by continuing to provide farm and forest (financial) management education to land managers;
- Create partnerships with conservation commissions on nonpoint source pollution education to homeowners;
- Offer educational events and materials (including radio and television programming) to the general public on natural resource and agricultural issues to increase public awareness and interest -- over time, these efforts can ease the way for conservation commissions who must work within the context of public opinion;
- Work with several adjacent conservation commissions to cosponsor watershed-based information sharing and problem solving site visits; Extension and its partners can provide site specific data and land management expertise;
- Continue to offer assistance with estate planning to individuals;

Public Policy:

Many conservation commissions become involved in issues with significant public policy implications, such as land conservation, development review, and local ordinances. These commissions would benefit from assistance in communicating effectively about these policy issues with members of their community and their region. Extension and its partners can:

- Offer workshops, presentations, and reference materials on strategies for educating town residents about the natural resources in their community;

- Offer workshops, presentations, and reference materials on the federal, state, and local regulatory context for natural resource management so that commissioners can be informed as they seek to ensure that environmental violations are prevented;
- Offer workshops, presentations, and reference materials on local options for using ordinances and zoning to promote conservation and stewardship;
- Offer workshops, presentations, and reference materials on effectively participating in development review at the local level (e.g., getting support from regulatory boards, creating an efficient process, avoiding politics, offering realistic suggestions for improvements;)
- Help conservation commissions to open a dialogue with town residents about the costs and benefits of commercial and residential development and the potential effects of conservation projects; The New Hampshire program,"Does Open Space Pay?," offers an exciting model for helping communities objectively explore this often divisive issue;
- Continue to promote strategies for sustainable economic development in communities to offset the perceived need for development at any cost;

Technical Capability:

There are a variety of ways in which conservation commissioners can enhance their ability to identify and achieve their conservation objectives through technical training. Extension and its partners can:

- Offer training in Geographic Information Systems and "community mapping," as well as how to make use of existing maps and data sources;
- Offer workshops, presentations, and reference materials on water quality protection strategies such as buffer strips, streambank restoration, stormwater management, and wetland and vernal pool delineation;
- Offer workshops, presentations, and reference materials on wildlife tracking and habitat improvement, scenic resource inventory, forest management, and reforestation techniques;
- Provide assistance to conservation commissions seeking funding for conservation projects;

Partnerships:

Because they are staffed by volunteers, conservation commissions have little time to focus on issues beyond their town borders. However, many recognize the impact that regional issues have on their community and would value the opportunity to bring a regional approach conservation issues. Additionally, conservation commissioners lack the time to actively seek volunteer assistance yet would benefit from linking up with groups or individuals that can help with their projects. Extension and its partners can:

- Help to build connections between university students and conservation commissions through a variety of service learning programs; By networking with commissions to find out about their projects, Extension personnel can bring these projects to service learning program coordinators at the university;
- Expand on and replicate New Hampshire's Project SERVE (Students for Environmental Resources and Volunteerism), a program in which Extension coordinates high school student involvement in conservation commission projects to link youth and community conservation needs;
- Conduct an ongoing assessment of conservation commission needs for training and assistance and bring this information to planning groups for state and regional conferences, such as the Vermont Town Officers' Educational Conferences, as well as individual organizations and agencies that can best meet current needs;

General Approaches:

There are a number of concepts that may be useful for Extension and other groups to utilize as they attempt to improve and expand existing assistance efforts for conservation commissioners:

- Collaboration between New Hampshire and Vermont can help in identifying resources and programs in each state and sharing what the other lacks;
- Emphasizing client-driven programs is most likely to effectively achieve real improvement in local communities;
- Providing local and regional, rather than statewide, training opportunities is likely to achieve greatest participation by conservation commissioners;
- Providing training opportunities through ongoing annual meetings and conferences that conservation commissioners already attend may have a greater return than developing new events;
- Streamlining outreach to conservation commissions may improve notification to commissions about training opportunities and other resources (publications, services); A unified outreach strategy that includes an annual calendar of events and a master list of publications and services may help commissioners take better advantage of resources;
- Connecting conservation commissions with existing Extension and other community volunteer networks may provide innovative opportunities for increasing effectiveness;
- Ongoing staff development and train-the-trainer opportunities in conservation planning and community development may help Extension and its partners to more effectively and consistently provide assistance to conservation commissions;

Helping Agencies:

There are a variety of organizations and agencies in New Hampshire and Vermont that interact both directly and indirectly with conservation commissions. These entities include:

- State conservation commission associations (i.e., New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions, Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions)
- Nonprofit natural resource advocacy organizations (e.g., Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, Vermont Natural Resource Council)
- Natural resource and forestry management programs (e.g., Vermont Coverts Inc., River Watch Network, Keeping Track)
- Membership organizations (e.g., New Hampshire Lakes Association, New Hampshire Association of Wetland Scientists, Vermont Wetlands Association)
- State natural resource agencies (e.g., New Hampshire Dept. of Environmental Services, New Hampshire Office of State Planning, Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, Fish and Wildlife departments)
- State-run natural resource protection programs (e.g., New Hampshire Urban Forestry Center, Lakes Lay Monitoring Programs, New Hampshire Coastal Program, Vermont Nongame and Natural Heritage Program)
- State associations of municipal governments (e.g., New Hampshire Municipal Association, Vermont League of Cities and Towns)
- Site specific environmental education and nature centers (e.g., Great Bay Estuarine Research Reserve, Vermont Institute for Natural Science)
- Land trusts
- Conservation districts
- Regional planning commissions/economic development commissions
- Audubon Society chapters
- State economic development agencies (e.g., New Hampshire Dept. of Resources and Economic Development, Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development)
- Certain funding organizations (e.g., Vermont Community Foundation, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board)
- Colleges and universities (e.g., Vermont Law School Environmental Law Center)
- Regionally based federal agencies (e.g., Connecticut River Joint Commissions, Silvio Conte Refuge, Lake Champlain Basin Program)

Each of these types of organizations can provide some form of support, assistance, or training to conservation commissions. To the extent that they are informed about the challenges that conservation commissions face, these groups can better direct resources to them.

VIII. EVALUATION

This section provides an evaluation of the achievements of our research project in comparison with our original objectives.

Evaluation of Research Methods

This project was an applied research study seeking breadth and depth of information about conservation commissions and commissioners. A purposeful sampling of commissions achieved a diverse selection of commissions for in-depth qualitative study. Content analysis was applied to qualitative data and statistical analysis was applied to quantitative data.

Our study used triangulation (i.e., use of a variety of data sources, data-gathering methods, and interpretative perspectives) in order to be comprehensive and accurate. Commissioner interviews, a mail survey, and review of newsletters and annual reports were the primary data-sources.

Data gathered through interviews can very effectively convey the experience and perspective of the individual conservation commissioner, but may be subject to lapses in memory or interviewer bias (Patton, 1990). To maximize the likelihood of gathering as complete a picture as possible of the experience of the conservation commission, all commissioners were interviewed whenever possible.

Research participants were assured confidentiality of their responses and so actual names of individuals and towns have not been provided in this report and every attempt was made to avoid mention of unique characteristics of towns and individuals. All interviewees and questionnaire recipients were informed about the possible audiences of the research prior to participation in interviews or response to questionnaires.

The response rate for the mail survey component was 62%. This participation rate is quite high with this type of population and suggests that the questionnaire instrument was appropriately designed. At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were offered the opportunity to write in their name and address if they wanted to receive the results of the survey. Over 70% of the 154 commissions that completed and returned questionnaires chose to include their name and address. This suggests overall interest in the content of the survey and a low level of frustration with the questionnaire format.

Several of the responding commissions provided write-in comments related to the questionnaire in general. One commission mentioned that it was difficult to summarize their activities in a "black and white" format, and that different aspects of their projects tend to be successful and unsuccessful. Another commission echoed this frustration and pointed specifically to the item "Dealing with state agencies." They had been frustrated with two state agencies but found all the rest to be very helpful. A third commission reported that they could not assign the values "successful" or "unsuccessful" to their work because their projects are still in progress. This same commission pointed out that the response option "Haven't used, but would like to try" contains two elements and that in some cases they haven't used a strategy, but also are not interested to try it.

Dissemination of Study Findings

The report of study findings and recommendations for training and support needed by conservation commissioners has been sent to over 70 different organizations in Northern New England, including: state conservation commission associations, northeastern Extension faculty in Natural Resources and Community Development, state natural resource and community development agencies, New Hampshire Municipal Association, New Hampshire and Vermont Regional Planning Commissions, and state natural resource agencies. Communications with these organizations emphasized opportunities for cooperative outreach initiatives and integration of study recommendations into existing training and assistance services.

A summary of successful conservation strategies and recommendations for action were distributed to conservation commissions in New Hampshire and Vermont. In addition, a presentation on "Top Ten Tips for Effective Commissions" was provided at the Vermont Association of Conservation Commissions Annual Meeting. Study findings were used to develop the presentation and handouts. Workshops based on study recommendations are planned for the New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions Annual Meeting and the Vermont Municipal Officers' Management Seminars in the Fall of 1998.

Study findings have been shared with state conservation commission associations in Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, and New Jersey.

Evaluation of Project Outcomes

This project's most significant outcome to date is the multi-state day-long meeting held in early June 1998 in which Extension and other partner agencies and organizations met to learn about the findings from this study and to brainstorm ideas for integrating these findings into current and future programming. We are particularly pleased to see this degree of involvement by the intended audience in developing recommendations for building on this research. Additionally, this in-service meeting received financial support from the New England Extension Consortium through a competitive mini-grant program.

Another major achievement of this project is the creation of a comprehensive list and description of potential partners for implementing our study's recommendations (see Appendix F). Each of these potential partners will receive a copy of the study report and an invitation to work with Extension in whatever capacity is appropriate to improve assistance and outreach to conservation commissions.

It is our hope that this report of gathered information and our interpretation of appropriate recommendations for conservation commissions and helping agencies provides an important new tool that will improve local conservation efforts. Our original problem statement was: "To uncover what has helped some commissions and commissioners set and achieve their local conservation goals and what has hindered some commissions and commissioners from doing this." We were successful in identifying a wide variety of effective strategies used by some conservation commissions that others do not use. Chapters VI and VII describe these strategies.

In numerous instances, examples of strategies used in one state were used to develop recommendations for commissions in the other state. We feel that the multi-state research approach was beneficial both in terms of gathering more useful information and in bringing together individuals from the two states to share ideas and plan future collaboration (i.e., through multi-state meetings and Project Advisory Board.)

An additional benefit of our research project is the inclusion of our study findings into the Conservation Commissioner Handbook being produced by the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions.

University of Vermont Extension has received a grant award of $8600 from the USDA Water Quality Grants program to support research, writing, and publication of four factsheets directed toward key water quality-related topics of interest to conservation commissions. This project will directly integrate findings from this research project. Four hundred copies of each factsheet will be produced and distributed and all four factsheets will be put on-line through the Vermont Center for Rural Studies web site. All factsheets will include: (1) a case study description of a conservation commission that successfully used the specific strategy with emphasis on important lessons learned and pitfalls to avoid; (2) a comprehensive listing of resource organizations, materials, individuals, and funding sources; and (3) simple guidelines on how to effectively integrate the strategy into existing commission activities and community situations.

Other important achievements of our project include:

- Involvement of key education deliverers in research design.
- Participation of 58 conservation commissioners in research interviews.
- Participation of 154 conservation commissions in the mail survey.
- Support from regional nursery stock supplier in the form of a tree donation.
- Student intern integrated into data-gathering and information dissemination efforts (approximately 135 hours).

REFERENCES

Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions. The Seedling. Calais, VT: AVCC, 3:2-4, 1995; 4:1, 1996.

Bevins, M. and D. Bischoff. Economic Handbook for Vermont Counties. Burlington, VT: Center for Rural Studies, 1993.

Brighton, D. and J. Northrup. Sustaining Agriculture: A Handbook for Local Action. Montpelier, VT: Vermont Department of Agriculture, Food and Markets, 1994.

Clark, Susan. Citizen Participation and Personal Political Power: Case Studies of Two Grassroots Environmental Groups, University of Vermont, Master's thesis, 1996.

Glesne, Corrine and Alan Peshkin. Becoming Qualitative Researchers, An Introduction, White Plains, NY: Longman, 1992.

Marek, L. Water and Sewage Treatment for Small Communities. Burlington, VT: University of Vermont Extension Service and Vermont Water Resources Research Center, 1984.

Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions. MACC Newsletter. Belmont, MA: MACC, 25:2-3, 1996.

Negra, C., M. Hathaway, and K. Wiberg (unpublished). Vermont Town Officers Survey: Summary Report. Burlington, VT: University of Vermont Extension System and Center for Rural Studies, 1995.

New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions. Conservation Commission News. Concord, NH: NHACC, 27:1-2, 1995; 28:1,3,4, 1996; 29:1-4, 1997; 30:1, 1998.

New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services. State of New Hampshire 1994 Section 305(b) Water Quality Report. Concord, NH: NH DES, 1994.

New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development, Division of Forests and Lands. New Hampshire Forest Resources Plan. 1996.

New Hampshire Annual Town Reports (various), 1996.

Patton, Michael Quinn. Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods, Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990.

Swope, M. Handbook for Municipal Conservation Commissions in New Hampshire. Concord, NH: NH Association of Conservation Commissions, 1988 revised 1991.

Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. Environment 1996. Waterbury, VT: VT ANR, 1996.

Vermont Economic Progress Council. A Plan for a Decade of Progress: Actions for Vermont's Economy. Montpelier, VT: Agency of Community Development, 1995.

Vermont Annual Town Reports (various), 1996.

Wiberg, K., A. Guptill, and F. Schmidt. The 1994 Vermonter Poll: Vermonters Answer Questions on Growth, the Environment, the Lottery, and Community Quality. Burlington, VT: Center for Rural Studies, 1995.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How long have you served on your conservation commission?

2. About how much time per month do you spend on conservation commission work?
   Probe: How is that time spent? Meetings, phone calls, research, site visits, other things?

3. What would you say is the most significant conservation issue that your community faces?
   Probe: How has your commission worked on this issue?
   Probe: Do you think your commission's efforts have made a large or small difference?

4. How does your commission decide what it will work on?
   Probe: Does your commission have a strategic plan? a mission statement? a multi-year project list?
   Probe: Does the commission primarily respond to things that come up?
   Probe: Are there one or two people who make these decisions or does the whole group participate?

5. What different types of skills do the people on your commission bring?
   Probe: Training in natural science or law? Experience with public speaking or working with the media? Experience working with legislators? Community organizing or volunteer development skills? Knowledge of the community?
   Probe: What particular skills do you bring to the commission?
   Probe: Are there particular types of skills or knowledge that you feel are lacking on your commission?

6. Of the conservation commission projects you have been involved in, which is the one you are proudest of?
   Probe: Could you describe it?
   Probe: What made it work well?

7. In working on its conservation projects, what obstacles has your commission encountered?
   Probe: For example, are there any conservation projects your commission attempted and then abandoned? Why?
   Probe: Are there any obstacles which your commission overcame?

8. What types of assistance has your commission received from groups outside your community?
   Probe: For example, state or federal agencies, non-profit groups, Extension?
   Probe: Does your commission use any documents or reports to obtain information and ideas for its conservation work?
   Probe: Have you been able to take advantage of any training since becoming a

conservation commissioner? Who offered the training? How much did you benefit from the training?

9. What type of outside assistance do you think would benefit your commission's conservation work?
   Probe: Are there particular types of training or information that you would most like to see offered?
   Probe: What types of groups or agencies do you think would best be able to provide assistance?

10. Could you describe the types of community outreach your commission has initiated?
    Probe: For example, community events, public meetings, community surveys, newspaper articles, mailings, etc.?
    Probe: What involvement has your commission had with other groups in town?
    Probe: Has your commission worked with business groups, youth groups, other municipal commissions like the planning commission, etc.?

11. What approach does your commission take to working within the community?
    Probe: Do you focus more on education or on advocacy and action?
    Probe: How do you think your commission is perceived by other town residents?
    Probe: Does your commission primarily respond to problems that arise or do you initiate new projects?

12. How has funding or lack of it influenced your commission's success?
    Probe: Does the town allocate a budget for the commission? Is it ever a controversial issue?
    Probe: Could you describe any fundraising efforts you have implemented?

13. Has your commission ever gone through a period of inactivity or low membership?
    Probe: How long was it?
    Probe: Why do you think that happened?

14. Is there anything else you would like to add or comment on?

Appendix B

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH PROJECT....

My name is Christine Negra and I work with the University of Vermont Extension. I also serve on the Conservation Board in Burlington, VT. Through a grant from the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development, I am conducting a research project about local conservation commissions with the help of the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions and the New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions.

The purpose of this project is to document how local conservation commissions function and to use this information to inform "helping" agencies such as Extension as to how they can best assist conservation commissioners to accomplish their conservation goals.

Ten conservation commissions within New Hampshire and Vermont have been selected for in-depth research. My objective was to select communities with different geographic, social, and economic characteristics. I plan to individually interview all the members of these commissions. Names of individuals and communities will not be listed in my write-up and I will make every effort to preserve the confidentiality of your comments.

I plan to use the information shared with me during interviews to identify patterns among different commissions. To confirm how common these patterns are, a short questionnaire will be sent to all New Hampshire and Vermont commissions in the fall. Conclusions from this study will be shared with individuals at state and federal agencies who currently, or might in the future, offer assistance and training to conservation commissioners. Findings may also be presented through conferences and publications. I am happy to share the findings from this project with you as well.

Interviews will last approximately an hour. Because the interview may take longer than that, and because I may have some follow-up questions, I would also like to ask permission now for a follow-up interview. I would like to tape this interview and will also take notes.

This interview is not designed to find out what you and your commission have done "right" or "wrong", but rather to see how you and your commission work and to identify the barriers and opportunities you have encountered.

January 5, 1998

Dear Conservation Commission Chairperson,

UNH Cooperative Extension and University of Vermont Extension will meet this spring to plan improvements to their outreach and assistance to local conservation commissions. To identify priority areas for Extension efforts, we are looking to commissions to give us some direction.

We are sending you a questionnaire which asks you about the concerns and frustrations your commission has encountered and the strategies your commission has used within the last 5-6 years.

As chair of the commission, we hope that you will be able to work with the rest of the commission members to respond to the questionnaire. Ideally, completing the questionnaire could be an agenda item at your next meeting. However, we know that not every commission meets monthly or that you may have other business for that meeting. In this case, we invite you as the chairperson to complete the questionnaire to the best of your ability and with input from as many commission members as you have time to contact.

Our hope is to receive all the completed questionnaires by early February. The questions have been designed to limit the amount of time required to respond and we estimate that it should take approximately 15-20 minutes. Through a donation from Northern Nurseries of White River Junction, all completed questionnaires received prior to February 10th will be entered into a **prize drawing** for a 2-inch caliper sugar maple for planting in the winning community.

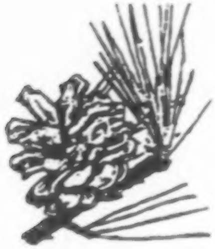
If you have any questions regarding the questionnaire, please feel free to contact Christine Negra at (802) 656-8373, Marjory Swope at the New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions (603) 224-7867 or Virginia Rasch at the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions (802) 223-5527.

Sincerely,

Lois M. Frey, Regional Specialist
Family & Community Resources and Economic Development

New Hampshire/Vermont Conservation Commission Survey

January 1998



uvmEXT

University of Vermont Extension

Check one:

___ We completed this questionnaire at a commission meeting.

___ The chair of our commission completed this questionnaire for the group.

___ Some members of the commission completed the questionnaire informally.

___ Other: ____

Thank you for your help!

Once you've completed the questionnaire, simply tape or staple it closed and drop in any U.S. mail box. If you are interested to receive the results of this survey, please write your name and address here:

____
____
____
____

What Environmental Problems Is Your Commission Concerned About?

1 = Extremely concerned *2 = Concerned* *3 = Not very concerned*

Circle 1, 2, or 3 for each

1 2 3 Degradation of rivers, streams, lakes, ponds or wetlands
1 2 3 Wildlife habitat fragmentation/loss
1 2 3 Loss of agricultural, forest, other open land
1 2 3 Poor management of agricultural/forest land
1 2 3 Declining aesthetic quality of village (downtown) areas
1 2 3 Loss of street trees
1 2 3 Loss of historic buildings, landmarks or sites
1 2 3 Degradation of scenic vistas
1 2 3 Excessive or inappropriate new development
1 2 3 Traffic congestion
1 2 3 Vandalism in natural areas
1 2 3 Need for household hazardous waste or recycling collections
1 2 3 Backyard burning
1 2 3 Illegal dumping
1 2 3 Existing contaminated sites (e.g., old mines o landfills)
1 2 3 Polluted runoff from roads and other sources
1 2 3 Lack of recreational access to rivers, lakes, and shorelines
1 2 3 Lack of recreational trails
1 2 3 Poor or weak town planning/zoning
1 2 3 Too little conservation land in town
1 2 3 Gaps in information about local natural resources and wildlife
1 2 3 Failing septic systems
1 2 3 Inadequate sewage treatment systems
1 2 3 Spreading of sludge/biosolids
1 2 3 Environmental impacts of town maintenance activities
1 2 3 Pesticide use on rights of way

1 2 3 Other ____
____
____

What Frustrations Has Your Commission Encountered?

1 = Extremely frustrated *2 = Frustrated* *3 = Not a problem*

Circle 1, 2, or 3 for each

1 2 3 Obtaining funds for commission projects
1 2 3 Attracting media coverage for commission events or projects
1 2 3 Finding a focus for the commission
1 2 3 Finding time for long-term planning/Moving beyond dealing with “brushfires”
1 2 3 Achieving agreement within the commission
1 2 3 Completing projects on time
1 2 3 Using resource inventory information
1 2 3 Prioritizing land for protection
1 2 3 Writing grant proposals
1 2 3 Finding ways to communicate with town residents
1 2 3 Recruiting new commission members or volunteers
1 2 3 Generating positive responses from the community
1 2 3 Communicating or working with other town boards
1 2 3 Participating in local planning or development review process
1 2 3 Dealing with weak local environmental protection
1 2 3 Promoting benefits of open space
1 2 3 Overcoming lack of awareness of costs of development
1 2 3 Monitoring easements
1 2 3 Finding help to maintain trails or conservation lands
1 2 3 Being unfamiliar with local ordinances or state and federal laws
1 2 3 Dealing with state agencies

1 2 3 Other ____
____
____

What Strategies Has Your Commission Used?

1 = Used successfully *2 = Used unsuccessfully*
3 = Haven't used, but would like to try *4 = Don't need*

Circle 1, 2, or 3 for each

1 2 3 4 Inventory and map natural resources
1 2 3 4 Use GIS or other mapping technology
1 2 3 4 Monitor water quality
1 2 3 4 Conduct a wildlife tracking program
1 2 3 4 Monitor environmental violations in town
1 2 3 4 Develop good relationships with other town boards
1 2 3 4 Bring community concerns to select board and planning commission
1 2 3 4 Bring information or resources from state agencies to the community
1 2 3 4 Participate in local planning
1 2 3 4 Draft zoning ordinances
1 2 3 4 Develop management plans for town-owned parcels
1 2 3 4 Develop partnerships with other commissions or organizations
1 2 3 4 Participate in inter-municipal projects
1 2 3 4 Involve students in conservation projects
1 2 3 4 Implement reforestation or restoration
1 2 3 4 Improve wildlife habitat
1 2 3 4 Clean up rivers and lakeshores
1 2 3 4 Improve aesthetic quality in town
1 2 3 4 Create recreational facilities
1 2 3 4 Coordinate environmental services (e.g., recycling, Green Up Day)
1 2 3 4 Promote environmental awareness and action within your community
1 2 3 4 Provide conservation education in schools
1 2 3 4 Promote appreciation and use of town natural areas
1 2 3 4 Work against inappropriate development
1 2 3 4 Help developers prevent ecological impacts
1 2 3 4 Create a commission mission statement
1 2 3 4 Raise funds for conservation
1 2 3 4 Hire environmental consultants
1 2 3 4 Purchase land for preservation

1 2 3 4 Other ____
____
____

January 26, 1998

Dear Conservation Commission Chairperson,

Just a reminder that we hope you will be able to complete and return the questionnaire that we sent to you a few weeks ago. All completed questionnaires received prior to February 10th will be entered into a **prize drawing** for a 2-inch caliper sugar maple tree.

If you have any questions regarding the questionnaire or need a replacement copy, please feel free to contact me at (802) 223-2389 or Christine Negra at (802) 656-8373.

Sincerely,

Lois M. Frey, Regional Specialist
Community Resources Development

APPENDIX E

OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES FROM NEW HAMPSHIRE/VERMONT CONSERVATION COMMISSION SURVEY

What environmental problems is your commission concerned about?

code#	comment
New Hampshire	
020	Our commission is very! concerned and frustrated with our lack of involvement in town planning issues - we have to "fight" our way through everything! Lack of recognition by other boards is a continual problem
030	Concerned - perhaps the expansion of the N.H.I.S. on Rt. 106!?
032	A disregard for wetland regulations by selectmen and business owners in town
038	Extremely concerned - Sand and grave pit/ operation near Conn. river. Clear cut of liquidation logging
042	Extremely concerned - Abuse of current use regulations - using current use as tax dodge only with no concern for intent of current use laws
050	Extremely concerned - Increasing rate of development
080	Extremely concerned - saltmarsh degradation from increased fresh water runoff
086	Hebron is geographically small, retirement area primarily, very well managed, no commercial development, very limited housing development, limited to consultation on lakeside sitework, monitoring wetlands (recently mapped and assisting wetlands bureau as requested (Aside: 086 marked off not very concerned for every category on page 1)
092	Protecting ??? water supports, specifically stratified drift and bedrock aquifers
100	Ex. concerned - conversions of land without evaluating impact on watershed (already have aquifer regs in place) especially by neighboring towns.
106	Bottle is needed in NH!
122	Circling '3' makes it look like we don't care (not very concerned) the reality is our time to devote to the problems is finite - in some of these items are handled (hopefully well) by other town agencies.
130	Ex. concerned - sand dumping on lakefronts without permit; excessive vegetation removal/clearing along shore frontage
133	We work closely with our planning board and selectmen. We have many trails

and nature trips and have a land trust organization in town.

137 We are concerned in general, but have most of these problems under control or are not threatened by them in our community at this time.

139 Preseving our water supply and system.

172 Concerned - Aquifer protection

178 Extreemely concerned - biggest concern: proper filing/reporting of intents to cut, wetland fills and logging BMP's

183 Extremely concerned - coordination withother organizations

Vermont

221 Too often reactive instead of proactive - too many bruch fires - need to work closer with planning and design review and council.

238 Concern - Herbicide use on rights of way.

239 We are beginning to undertake an inventory of town resources. Many of the above issues that we are concerned with will be addressed/identified. Our hope is to survey town residents and involve then in the process of identifying and prioritizing thowns resources. Hopefully we will be building awareness and consensus on these issues listed above.

253 Speeding in town

What frustrations has your commission encountered?

code# comment

New Hampshire

020 We are currently involved in a strategic planning process which addresses many of the above concerns - it is why the commission as a whole could not fill out this questionairre.

025 Not a problem- We have undertaken supervision of 3 projects relating to the safety and aestetics of the town: 1) installation of dry hydrants, 2)graveyard cleanup, 3)return of the blue bird project

030 Money set purposely for Land Aquisitions most officials (town) believe the "current use reg." is enough! (We get 100%) But not enough is ?????? !

032 Extemely frustrated - finding commission members with the desire and time to serve on the commission

038 Extremely frustrated - Our commission is only two members. We exist in name only, so at least our town has a con. com.

042 Extremely frustrated - NH DES Wetlands. People are impossible to deal with. The arogance, vindictiveness, and capricious decissions are rampant within the whole division. NH would be much better off without them rather than have to deal with thier political posturing

046 Extremely frustrated - getting adequate space for commission files

050 Extremely frustrated - Ability to be proactive re develpment rather than reactiv

086 I have lived here 30 years and have seen only modest change, none of it undesirable or threatening to the environment. We all know how fortunate we are and protect it. It took too long to get the funds for wetlands mapping. Some change (2) to selectman incumbency loosed to purse strings recently.

091 Working on working with other boards and participating in local planning

092 Biggest Problem: Clear, Long-term goals that are understood by members and citizens and lead to a sustained conservation ethic. Note: we haven't got to this...yet!

094 Focused: Proactive not just reactive (time to be)

100 Getting and keeping new officials at environmental training workshops and Ex. frustrated with the enforcement by selectmen - reluctance to start local enforcement action assuming the state will do it.

122 I found this questionaire a frustration - choosing 1,2,3,or 4 was often not what I wanted to say-

151 Involving commission with broader scope of outreach. Time constraints seem to prevent Conservation Commission members from pursuing projects independently between meetings

155 "Frustration" label turned us all off. This kind of work -cons. commission. - by its design requires patience and priorities.

162 Extremely Frustrated - DES Wetland Board Violations - Corrective Action

174 We just don't have the ability to do a good job as volunteers

186 Extremely frustrated - Lack of administrative support (secretarial) access to our files when ever we need to refer to them. Security and intergrity of our files.

199 Extremely frustrated - dealing with the EPA.

Vermont

221 We need to integrate our concern with other city boards - think conservation often get isolated from the big picture- sometimes this is self inflicted, sometimes we are ignored.

228 It is deplorable that state Environmental Court would overturn a Jericho Planning Commission Decision refusing a wetland development, thus paving the way for an unwanted housing cluster after 5 years of testimony by affected neighbors, the conservation commission and technical consultants

229 The absolutely biggest frustration is dealing with state and federal agencies.

233 First, ask if these topics are frustrating, or perhaps, better yet, ask for a range of responses, not just this emphasis on frustration. Just because something is a problem, doesn't mean it's frustrating.

246 Extremely frustrated - consistently meeting quorum.

What strategies has your commission used?

code# comment

New Hampshire

020 Used successfully - Public outreach events such as town forest dedication, nature walks, etc, also "openspace openhouse" night with other area commissions and boards invited.

030 100% current use ex. tax.

032 Used unsuccessfully - place conservation easements on town forest lands

046 Used successfully - Sent letters to large owners of openspace and undeveloped land inviting them to establish conservation easements on this land

050 Used successfully - promoting value of conservation in the community

059 This was hard to answer. Several marked 1 are things we are trying to do now with mixed or unknown success

068 We have 3 members, I am a retired navy pilot. One is a surveyor/site work contractor born and raised here, and one an electrical contractor, lifelong resident. Circumstances make us reactive vs. proactive. we meet on a 'needs' basis.

091 We are learning to develop good relation with other town boards but at times feel a lack of success. Hope for improvement. Problem- getting board

members - working on this problem

092 Used Unsuccessfully: Community education and awareness - we fall short of this... it usually doesn't get done.

094 Being reasonable and logical (scientifically and politically) in planning and problem solving.

122 If I checked nothing- it means we haven't even thought of it - or someone else is doing it or we may need but don't have the time to use.

168 Our commission, at this time does not have the authority to raise funds - this is the second year we have sponsored a warrant article to allow us to raise and manage funds

174 Brush fire approach

176 Haven't used but would like to try - Information regarding state or national conservation programs/activities which we could tie into always comes too late for us to work with and promote.

178 Used successfully - coordinated yearly recycling effort for town- e.g. scrap metal collection 3x and fire collection 2x and household hazardous waste 2x.

183 Used successfully - protection of wildlife habitat and corridors

197 Hard to put our answers in the categories allowed - these are more actions than strategies.

199 Used unsuccessfully - dealing with the planning/ zoning board is next to impossible.

Vermont

207 Haven't used but would like to try-information on establishing a conservation district.

221 We have applied to UVM to have students use as a project - the inventory of North Branch River Pack to help us complete a full inventory of city properties.

222 Used successfully - focus each year on one major project - doing others as interest event suggest - have some on-going responsibilities too. Commissions or volunteers can't do everything.

225 Used successfully - have liaison appointed to planning commission. Very successful in developing good coordination.

229 Our commission decided at the outset and continues to stay out of the

regulation/zoning arena - prefering instead to be the "white knights" doing good deeds in the community.

Other Random Comments

code#	comment
New Hampshire	
041	Not an easy survey - so many things in this area are not black and white. Time is always an issue and while there may be concerns it is not a focus - projects are almost always a mixture of succesion and partial succession and unsuccessful pieces.
042	Typical Survey - too many compromises in the answers available. i.e., Frustrations "Dealing withe state agencies"- two agencies only, the rest are helpful, kind, responsive, and a benifit to all. So how do we answer? Probably 40% of the questions fall into this area. Dalton is a rural town of 900 residents - we have the same concerns as Burlington, VT of Manchester, NH but all the factors involved are different, the definitions are different, the answers are different, the degree of concern are different, and most importantly the effect of outside influence is different. You might want to consider a survey on how small local commissions deal with the subject of larger communities, actions/reactions affect on the smaller communities
133	We have an active, well-supported conservation commission witha good reputation in town. Water quality land protection and suggesting appropriate ordinances are a big part of our work.
Vermont	
242	To whom it concerns, Section three what strategies has your commission used does not accurately represent our commission. Our commission is in the process of revival after a few years of memership discord, consequently our work is in process. We cannot attach the judgement of "successful" or "unsuccessful" to anything. Option three is really asking two things. "Haven't used", then "Would like to try", are different. Some things we haven't used, we may have no interest in trying, but there seems to be no option so we circled 3. Generally this survey has the potential to help our commission identify concerns for our future direction.

APPENDIX F

Potential Partners for Outreach to Conservation Commissions

New Hampshire:

Audubon Society of New Hampshire

The Audubon Society of New Hampshire works with New Hampshire Communities through its involvement with natural resource inverntories, land protection projects, species monitoring and protection projects, advocating for policies and legislation to protect and conserve areas at risk, and educational workshops. The Society's Environmenrtal Policy Department is involved with lobbying the congressional delegation on issues facing communities. Their Conservation Legislation Volunteer Corp represents and defends environmental interests before legislature. In 1997 the Audubon Society of New Hampshire trained conservation committees to evaluate and protect New Hampshire's wetlands.

Telephone # (603) 224-9909
3 Silk Farm Rd., Concord, New Hampshire, 03301-8200

Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests

SPNHF is a statewide, private, non-profit, membership-supported land conservation organization. The Society works to protect New Hampshire forests through research, education, and advocacy. Presently they are working on researching land using GIS which helps communities to understand the ecological makeup of the land and identify specific areas of land for protection. Through advocacy, the Society has had success in public land acquisition, water and air protection programs, and tax reform towards conservation. Courses, workshops, and special events are offered to members. These educational activities focus on forestry, timber inventory, soils, wetlands,and ecosystem management.

Telephone # (603) 224-9945
email: "rconroy@spnhf.org" or website: "www.spnhf.org"
54 Portsmouth Street, Concord, NH, 03301-5400

New Hampshire Municipal Association

NHMA is a non-profit, non-partisan membership organization of municipalities which collaborates to exchange information and meet with government officials to make more effective and efficient policies. The NHMA works with communities, developing programs to meet their needs. Members are permitted to assist in the development of municipal policy as well as vote on the policy. NHMA provides an array of services which include: legal, managerial, and technical advice, legislative policy development, professional seminars and training programs, and the Staff Outreach program in which NHMA staff meet with local officials in their communities.

Telephone # (603) 224-7447
email: "nhma@nhmunicipal.org"

New Hampshire Urban Forestry Center

The NH Urban Forestry Center is part of the New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development, Division of Forests and Lands. The Center is used as a Tree Farm, a bird and wildlife sanctuary, a garden demonstration site, and as a learning center offering such topics as forest management, ecology, tree and plant identification, and wildlife stewardship. The Urban Forestry Center offers technical assistance to conservation commissions and others involved with the trees in New Hampshire's urban and community forests to guide in how to select, plant, and maintain the trees and shrubs for towns and cities. The center also offers technical advice towards landscaping. Throughout the year, the Center conducts weekly seminars led by expert speakers; slide shows; historical programs; field trips; and hands-on demonstrations, where you can learn about any topic connected with forestry and natural resources.

Telephone # (603) 431-6774
45 Elwyn Rd., Portsmouth, NH, 03801

New Hampshire Lakes Association

The New Hampshire Lakes Association is a statewide, nonprofit, volunteer organization. The association is concerned with shoreland and watershed protection, water quality improvement, boating and recreation, lake environment education, and fisheries and wildlife preservation. The Association is dedicated to representing its members before state government by advocating protective policies to the executive, legislative and judicial branches. The New Hampshire Lakes Association assists local communities by maintaining an outreach network, promoting in-lake water quality programs, hosting the annual New Hampshire Lakes Congress, informing the public and legislature on lake issues in their information and research center, and developing education programs.

Telephone # (603) 226-0299
7 South State Street, Concord, NH 03301

New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services

The Department of Environmental Services' responsibilities include: ensuring high levels of water quality for water supplies, ecological balance, and recreational benefits; regulating the emissions of air pollutants; fostering the proper management of municipal and industrial waste; and managing water resources for future generations. The department is made up of three divisions: Air Resources, Waste Management, and Water. DES encourages public involvement through their programs concerning household and hazardous waste, rivers management and protection, wetlands, air resources, and oil remediation and compliance. The New Hampshire Rives Management and protection Program and the wetland program work with organizations towards designating rivers and wetlands to be protected by RSA 482.

Telephone # (603) 271-3503
6 Hazen Drive, Concord, NH 03301

New Hampshire Office of State Planning

Telephone # (603) 271-2155
2 ½ Beacon St. Concord, NH 03301

New Hampshire Coastal Program

The Coastal Program, part of New Hampshire Office of State Planning, offers grant opportunities for local communities, non-profit organizations, state agencies, public school districts and research institutuins. These opportunities often involve planning, management, and construction projects. Some examples include: waterfront access creation and enhancement; environmental remediation; pollution prevention; habitat inventories; land protection planning; waterfront park planning and improvement; and environmental research. The New Hampshire Coastal Program has developed and is overseeing the implementation of the state's Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Program. This involves cooperation amoung state and local control measures; public education and public participation opportunities for nonpoint source control; and long-term water quality monitoring and research support in the coastal area. The Coastal Program provides informational bulletins, media coverage, a newsletter, workshops and direct communications with towns on relevant coastal issues.

Telephone #(603) 431-9366
email: "dhartman@tec.nh.us"
Website: "http://www.state.nh.us/coastal"
152 Court St., Portsmouth, NH 03801

New Hampshire Fish & Game Department

New Hampshire Fish and Game Department works to protect, conserve, and restore the wildlife resources of the state. The department works to protect as well as manage wildlife habitat. They provide technical information and guidance to private landowners, communities, and the public through their wildlife education centers including workshops for teachers and community members, hunter education program, aquatic resources education program, the Merrimack River Watershed Education Program, Bowhunter Education, and Trapper Education.

Telephone # (603) 271-3421

email: "info@wildlife.state.nh.us."
Website: "www.wildlife.state.nh.us"
2 Hazen Drive, Concord, NH, 03301

New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions

The New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions is a private, non-profit organizaton with a membership of 150+ municipalities. The association provides information and occasional programs on pollution, wetland ecology, conservation issues and land use planning. The association provides a number of different resources including information sheets and pamphlets as well as the "Handbook for Municipal Conservation Commissions in New Hampshire", a quarterly newsletter, and periodic legislative status reports.

Telephone #: (603) 224-7867
54 Portsmouth St., Concord, NH 03301

County Conservation Districts

The County Conservation Districts are non-profit organizations. Their goal is to encourage conservation and wise use of soil, water, and related natural resources. They offer free programs: teacher training, workshops, field days, classroom assistance on soil, water, wildlife, pollution, conservation, land-use planning, soil and water conservation, farmland protection, woodland erosion control, pond ecology, and related subjects. They offer technical advice, free information sheets and pamphlets, and free audio-visual and exhibit materials.

Telephone #s of Conservation Districts, offices within each county:

•	Belknap County	524-6615
•	Carroll County	447-2771
•	Cheshire County	352-3602
•	Coos County	788-4651
•	Grafton County	747-2001
•	Hillsborough County	673-2409
•	Merrimack County	225-6401
•	Rockingham County	772-4385
•	Strafford County	749-3037
•	Sullivan County	542-6681

Great Bay Estuarine Research Reserve

The Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve is one of 22 nationwide reserves which has been put aside for long-term protection and management to improve understanding of estuaries. It is managed by New Hampshire Fish and Game department. The reserve also includes the Sandy Point Discovery Center which is an educational center for the public. The Reserve involves local citizens through volunteer waterfowl monitoring programs and summer shorebird monitoring programs. Local water quality monitoring is also done through the reserve. Their focus is management, resource, and education.

Telephone #: (603)778-0015
89 Depot Rd. Stratham, NH 03885

Upper Valley Land Trust

UVLT is private, membership-supported nonprofit organization that works to conserve lands on the New Hampshire and Vermont borders of the Connecticut River. The organization works with communities and landowners to protect agricultural land, forestland and wildlife habitat, recreational land, and scenic areas. UVLT uses conservation easements to permanantly limit the development of designated land. The Stewardship Program is made up of volunteers who monitor the conserved lands. UVLT provides presentations for local groups and organizes an annual winter gathering for conservation commissioners in the region.

Telephone # (603) 643-6626
Website: "http://www.valley.net/~uvlt/F/"
19 Buck Road, Hanover, NH 03755

Vermont:

The Vermont Community Foundation

The Vermont Community Foundation exists to support current issues within communities. The foundation provides funds to help non-profit organizations explore or undertake new work or to improve on already started projects. The VCF program interest include projects within Vermont communities that support...but are not limited to...the arts and humanities, education, the environment, historic resources,health, public affairs and community development, and social services. Grants are made twice a year. An additional component entity of the Vermont Community Foundation is the Technical Assistance Program which offers non-profit management and leadership workshops through out the year.

Telephone #: (802) 388-3355
PO Box 30 Middlebury, VT 05753

Vermont Audubon Society

Telephone # 802/434-4300
65 Millet St., Richmond, VT 05477-9612

Vermont Coverts, Inc

Vermont Coverts, Inc. is a non-profit organization of forest owners seeking to maintain and enhance wildlife habitat. Vermont Coverts is a state-wide organization of volunteers who are known a Cooperators. Vermont Coverts Cooperators work to improve the quality of management of private forestlands with a special emphasis on wildlife habitat. The Cooperators manage an educational program for forest land owners known a Woodlands for Wildlife, an annual three-day workshop centered on the ecological principles and activities of managing a forest for wildlife habitat. Coverts is also a means for forestland owners to have personal contact with other forestland owners. Coverts also has contacts with government officials, legislators, forest resource managers including foresters, wildlife specialists, loggers, and businesses which utilize wood. Coverts' outreach activities include a newletter and school programs. The newletter provides information on upcoming events (meetings and workshops), education updates on Vermont foresting, and updates on Coverts.

Telephone # (802) 878-2180
421 Gov. Chittenden Rd., Williston, VT, 05495

Lake Champlain Basin Program

LCBP is a government-funded initiative working on Opportunities for Action: An Evolving Plan for the Lake Champlain Basin. LCBP has been working to educate and involve the public on issues reguarding Lake Champlain. LCBP also offers grants programs for projects that support its objectives.

Telephone # (800) 468-LCBP or email at: lcbp@vbi.champlain.edu
Gordon-Center House, 54 West Shore Road, Grand Isle, Vermont 05485

Vermont Institute for Natural Science

VINS is dedicated to researching and educating communities about the local environment. VINS volunteer group, ELF, works in 65 towns to educate school children. VINS also offers outreach presentations for communities. Some examples of presentations are: nature discovery walks, night prowling, aquatic ecosystem study, what bird is that?, the wildlife garden, designing habitats for wild creatures, etc. VINS three branches, in Woodstock, Manchester, and Montpelier, offer a large selection of environmental education programs for children, adults, and communities.

Telephone # (802) 457-2779
RR#2, Box 532, Woodstock, VT, 05091

Vermont League of Cities and Towns

VLCT is a non-partisan, non-profit organization owned by Vermont's municipal governments. The League provides services to all 246 of Vermonts cities and towns. The League offers a variety of services with its memership, including research and imformation sharing, training, technical assistance, legislative advocacy, group insurance, programs, and legal assistance. VLCT works to educate state and federal officials about the impacts their actions have on local governments, and to inform them of the needs of Vermont's municipalities.

Telephone #: (802) 229-9111 or (800) 649-7915
email: "info@vict.org"
Fax: (802) 229-2211
89 Main St., Suite 4, Montpelier, VT 05602-2948

Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development

There are three major departments included in the Agency of Commerce and Community Development: Economic Development, Housing and Community Affairs, and Tourism and Marketing. The goals of the Agency are to preserve Vermont's heritage, promote vibrant communities, and create a sustainable economy.

The Department of Housing and Community Affairs and the Division for Historic Preservation work together. The Vermont Community Development Progam (VCDP) assists communities by providing financial and technical assistance to address local priorities for housing, economic development, public facilities, and public services for persons of low to moderate incomes. The VCDP is funded through the Federal Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG). Funding preference for CDBG awards is given to projects that maintain the historic settlement patterns of compact village and downtown centers, separated by rural countryside.

The Vermont Downtown Program (VDP) works with communities to develop a sustainable downtown management strategy, and encourages state policy and progerams that favor downtown reinvestment over sprawl development.

Telephone #: (802) 828-3211 OR (800) 622-4553
National Life Building, Drawer 20, Montpelier, VT 05620-0501
Website:" www.state.vt.us/dca"

Regional Planning Commissions

Vermont's 12 regional planning commissions work closely with the Department of Housing and Community Affairs. The commissions provide technical assistance to towns on a wide range of issues, including land use planning and regulation, economic development, housing and transportation. The commissions have played a central role in helping towns administer the Federal Community Development Block Grants. The department works with the commissions and University of Vermont Extension to offer planning and zoning workshops to town officials twice a year. Commissions also provide assistance to the department's development of state policy and legislation. Contact Agency of Development and Community Affairs for further information. (802) 828-3211.

- Addison County Regional Planning Commission, 79 Court St., Middlebury, VT 05653
- Bennington County Regional Commission, PO Box 342, US Route 7A, Arlington, VT 05250
- Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission, 26 State St., Montpelier, VT 05602
- Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, 66 Pearl St. PO Box 108, Essex Junction, VT 05453
- Northeastern Vermont Development Association, PO Box 630, St. Johnsbury, VT 05819
- Lamoille County Planning Commission, PO Box 1009, Morrisvile, VT 05661-1009
- Northwest Regional Planning Commission, 140 South Main St., St. Albans, VT 05478
- Rutland Regional Planning Commission, PO Box 965 - Opera House, Merchants Row, Rutland, VT 05701
- Lamoille Economic Development Corporation, PO Box 455, Morrisville VT 05661
- Northeastern VT Development Association, PO Box 630, St. Johnsbury, VT 05819
- Rutland Economic Development Association, 256 N. Main St., Rutland, VT 05701
- Springfield Regional Development Corporation, PO Box 58, Springfield, VT 05156
- Southern Windsor Planning Commission, The Ascutney Professional Bldg., PO Box 320, Route 5, Ascutney, VT 05030
- Two Rivers-Ottauquechee Regional Commission, King Farm, Woodstock, VT 05901
- Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission, 77 Bank St., Lebanon, NH 03766
- Windham Regional Commission, 139 Main St. Suite 505, Brattleboro, VT 05302

Vermont Housing and Conservation Board

The VHCB offers funding programs for local and statewide conservation projects. The VHCB combines two goals of offering safe, decent, and affordable housing for low income Vermonters with conserving Vermont's important lands and historic properties. VHCB depends on local organizations involvement at the community level to address local situations. The VHCB awards housing and conservation funds. In addition to the major project grants and loans provided by the board, the agency has several smaller programs that help maximize the effects of VHCB funds. These include feasibility funds to assist with analysis for individual projects, local conservation funds for towns and nonprofits to work on local conservation projects, organizational grants for nonprofits, and a home access program.

Telephone # (802) 828-3250
149 State St., Montpelier, VT 05602

Vermont Land Trust

Vermont Land Trust is a private, non-profit, land conservation organization dedicated to permanently conserving land in Vermont. VLT's experts provide conservation advice through the seven regional offices throughout the state. VLT provides legal, technical, mapping, stewardship, and financial support to communities, local and regional land trusts, and State agencies to help them achieve their conservation priorities.

Telephone # (800) 639-1768 or
email at http://www.vlt.org/
8 Bailey Avenue, Montpelier, Vermont 05602

University of Vermont Natural Areas Center

Offers coursework in land conservation planning and implementation and manages university-owned natural areas.

Telephone # (802) 656-4055
153 So. Prospect St., Burlington, VT 05401

Vermont Law School Summer Courses

Most summer classes have an average enrollment of 30 students, encouraging discussion and participation. Participants acquire a working knowledge of the law and science on which environmental policy is based, and explore major environmental issues with leading national experts in a collaborative environment. Examples of classes are Ecology, Land Use, Environmental Law, Mediation, Environmental Enforcement, Risk Assessment and the Law, Emerging environmental policies, Vermont's Act 250, Conservation Land Trusts, etc..

Telephone #: (800)227-1395
Environmental Law Center, Chelsea Street, South Royalton, Vermont 05068

Vermont Agency of Natural Resources

The Agency of Natural Resources oversees the the Department of Fish and Wildlife; the Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation; and the Department of Environmental Conservation. Special programs include: Lakes Lay Monitoring Program; Non-game and Natural Heritage Program. Some of the methods the Agency applies are: providing monetary incentives for responsible, environmental practices, holding briefings for legislators, identifying resources which need to be sustained (inventory), improving public outreach and education, developing policies for state for natural resources, expansion of pollution prevention and reduction programs, analysis of resources, have power in government towards laws and policies, the acency provides technical assistance (GIS), and provides permits to members of the public.

Telephone # (802) 241-3600
Website: "http://www.anr.state.vt.us/"
Center Building 103 South Main Street, Waterbury, VT 05671-0301

Vermont Natural Resources Council

VNRC is a statewide environmental organization in Vermont. They work with grassroots activists and conservation groups on issues related towards Vermont's forests, water, and land use.

Telephone # (802) 223-2328
email: "VNRC@plainfield.bypass.com"
9 Bailey Avenue, Montpelier, Vermont 05602

Vermont Wetlands Association

The Vermont Wetlands Association (VWA) is a non-profit environmental organization founded to promote the conservation and wise use of Vermont's wetlands. The VWA is made up of a variety of wetland enthusiasts including: federal, state and local regulators, environmental consultants, landowners with wetlands on their property, students and faculty from area universities, and others interested in learning more about Vermont's wetland resources. The primary goal of VWA is to promote a better understanding and appreciation of Vermont's wetlands by encouraging the exchange of ideas, information and knowledge about wetlands. The VWA offers annual membership meetings, presentations on a variety of wetland topics, a quarterly newsletter, field trips to wetlands throughout the state, and wetland workshops and seminars.

PO Box 433, Montpelier, VT, 05602

River Watch Network

The River Watch Network is a national, non-profit organization. RWN guides communities in developing a stategy for river monitoring and protection programs. They assist communities in defining the most critical issue concerning their river and then design and execute scientific studies that asses the health of the river ecosystem. The River Watch Networks also assists groups by supplying them with the necessary tools to solve river related problems, helping groups to network with other conservation groups, and by educating communities through workshops.

Telephone #: (802) 223-3840
email: "riverwatch@rwn.igc.org"
Website:"http://www.riverwatch.org"
153 State Street, Montpelier, VT, 05602

"Keeping Track"

Keeping Track is a non-profit organization dedicated to identifying and monitoring important wildlife habitat and travel corridors, educating the public about the importance of wildlife habitat conservation, and encouraging cooperation among conservation and natural resourse groups. Communities are taught how to apply their tracking skills to accumulate data which will aid landowners and planners in making informed decisions about wildlife habitat protection. Keeping Track offers slide lectures, community track and sign survey training, preliminary habitat evaluations, year round tracking and habitat workshops, and single and multiday school programs.

Telephone # (802) 899-2030
c/o Susan Morse, RD #1 Box 263, Jericho, VT, 05465

The Vermont Association of Conservation Districts (VACD)

VACD is the nonprofit organization of Vermont's Conservation Districts. Conservation Districts are the local connection for federal assistance on natural resource conservation. The districts collect information and determine where local natural resources and conservation problems exist within their district boundries and determine the means to address these issues. The Vermont Conservation Districts focus on agriculture, soil erosion prevention, water quality, public education, groundwater, wetlands, wildlife, recreation, sustainable agriculture, ans conservation.

504 Thompson Hill Rd., Weybridge, VT 05753

- Addison County Conservation District, Route 7 South RD4, Box 1302, Middlebury, VT 05753
- Bennington County Conservation District, 118 South St., Bennington, VT 05201
- Caledonia & Essex Counties Conservation District, Federal Building, Rm. 216, 26 Main St, St. Johnsbury, VT 05819
- Franklin and Grand Isle County Conservation District, 6 Vally Crossroads, St. Albans, VT 05478
- Lamoille County Conservation District, RR#4, Box 932, Proffessional Drive, Morrisville, VT 05661
- Orleans County Conservation District, Waterfront Plaza Ag. Offices, Newport, VT 05855
- Rutland County Conservation District, 170 south Main St., Rutland, VT 05701

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- Washington County Conservation District, RR#4 Box 2292 Comstock Road, Berlin, VT 05602
- Windham County Conservation District, 28 Vernon St., Brattleboro, VT 05302-8605
- Windsor County Conservation District, Gilman Office Center, Bldg #12, Suite 3, White River Junction, VT 05001
- Winooski Natural Resource Conservation District, 18 Blair Park, Suite 207, Williston, VT 05495-9406